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XXVIII.

THE  
RESULTS OF A DUEL.

BY FORTUNE DU BOISGOBEY

LONDON:  
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1888.



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# THE RESULTS OF A DUEL.

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## I.

THIS is a story of recent times. The early spring weather had already brought out the leaves on the old chestnut trees in the garden of the Tuileries, and the sprouting grass was decking with verdure the bare plains which border the Seine north of Paris, between Asnières and Saint-Denis.

An open barouche, drawn by two good horses, and driven by a coachman in livery, had just passed over the bridge of Saint-Ouen, and was proceeding at a rapid pace along the dusty road which traverses the peninsula of Gennevilliers. The occupants of the carriage were three in number; three men, all young; the eldest being not more than thirty. They had not left Paris to amuse themselves, for they were dressed in black from head to foot, and people who pride themselves on knowing the customs of society do not dress in that fashion for a pic-nic in the country.

"Look! there are some fellows going to refresh themselves with a little cold steel," exclaimed a road-mender, who was engaged in breaking stones on the side of the highway.

"There's plenty of spare room about here for that sort of thing," rejoined a market gardener, leaning upon his spade and watching the carriage.

"Those suburban observers are very clever," said the occupant of the front seat of the barouche, a tall fellow, with a pleasant face.

"How the devil could they have guessed that one of us was going to fight?" asked a tall dark gentleman, one of those who sat opposite to him.

"Well, it wasn't a very difficult thing. We are three, and there are always three when a duel is to be fought, the principal and his two seconds; moreover, we are all three in frock coats and buttoned up to the chin, as is the fashion in such affairs. Then it is scarcely two o'clock, and it is so unpicturesque about here that it is evident we are not driving about for pleasure. Heavens! Should we be here if Monsieur de Pontaurmur and his acolytes had not given us an

appointment to settle a foolish quarrel? That road-mender, judging by his appearance, has served in the army, and at a glance he understood what was up. Only, he was mistaken in speaking about cold steel, for Saulieu is to fight with pistols. I'll be hanged, by the way, if I know why this duel is to take place with pistols. That was the fashion under the Restoration, but now-a-days people are not partial to fire-arms."

"You forget, my dear Coulanges, that I did not have the choice of weapons," gently said the third occupant of the carriage. This last speaker was slender and light complexioned; he had good features and a pleasant expression.

"It was your own fault if you didn't, Saulieu; there was no need for you to strike that brute of a Pontaumur before a dozen people, and without any reason, too."

"There always is a reason when one provokes a challenge with the necessity of accepting one's adversary's conditions."

"Well, doubtless, there was a reason; but you have not deemed it proper to tell me what it was," said the dark gentleman, the one who had been astonished by the road-mender's perspicacity.

"Excuse me, but you were at the club when Monsieur de Pontaumur, who was my partner at whist, reproached me in extremely vulgar terms for having made a mistake."

"Oh! he told you that you played like a dummy. It wasn't very polite, but it wasn't a grave insult, and I assure you that I, George Courtenay, who am not very good-tempered, would never have responded to such a remark with a blow. And yet I do not like the man who made it. Well, he received the blow, and there was nothing for him but to efface the insult. You had placed yourself entirely in the wrong, and we were obliged to submit to the exactions of his seconds, two men whom I like no better than I like him. There is one of them, especially, whom I almost mistrust."

"Corléon!" exclaimed Coulanges. "It is said that he cheats at cards. I have never detected him doing so, but I think that he is quite capable of assisting luck, and, for my own part, I cannot abide him."

"All the same," said Courtenay, "you are going to give this Pontaumur a good lesson, Maurice. I am astonished that he has chosen pistols, for he knows that you are a magnificent marksman, while he himself is by no means a bad swordsman."

"It matters to me little how I fight, providing I do fight," murmured Maurice Saulieu.

Courtenay gazed fixedly at his friend, who turned his eyes away, and the conversation ceased.

However brave a man may be, or however accustomed to affairs of this sort, he feels the need of collecting himself a little during the last few minutes which precede the meeting, especially when the latter has been brought about by serious causes, and Courtenay was beginning to suspect that this duel had a motive which the two

combatants did not wish to disclose. He was well acquainted with the character of Maurice, who was his oldest and best friend ; they had been schoolfellows ; they had entered society together, and were seldom apart, although of different dispositions and tastes. However, like love, friendship is often founded upon contrasts. This was the first time that Maurice had hidden anything from George, who never concealed anything from him, not even his love affairs.

Maurice, although calm, was silent and preoccupied. As for Coulanges, he bore a grave air, perhaps perforce, for he was much less intimate than George Courtenay with Maurice Saulieu, and he had been chosen as a second chiefly on account of his profession. He had just qualified as a medical practitioner. No one would have guessed this from the life he led, for he was to be met wherever there was anything amusing going on. He had become a doctor as he would have become a lawyer, in order not to go against the wishes of his family ; however, his father having left him some thirty thousand francs a year, he did not bother himself about the practice of his profession.

"We are getting near the place," he said at last, to break the silence which weighed upon him. "I recognise that field of asparagus. I served as a second last year at the same spot, near the old earthworks called the redoubt of Gennevilliers, which was not levelled after the siege. One might think it had been erected for the express use of duellists, for it was never bombarded by the Germans, and it is an excellent spot for crossing swords or exchanging pistol shots."

"Speaking of pistols," said George, "you made sure, I suppose, that those which these gentlemen are going to use have never been fired before ?"

"I went and bought them yesterday at Galand's, with Monsieur Corléon, who pretends he knows all about firearms, and we both examined them and saw that they were quite new. We also examined the powder and bullets. And everything was placed in a box, which Corléon kept, after locking it up in my presence and giving me the key. Unless I had placed seals upon the box I couldn't have taken more precautions."

"Oh, what you did was sufficient. We have agreed with them as to the conditions of the duel, twenty paces and simultaneous fire at the word of command ; the combat is to cease after the third shot has been exchanged, even if neither of the adversaries is hit."

"Quite so. That is the precise programme. And here is the path which leads to the redoubt that you see below there."

"We have not arrived here first. I see a cab yonder ; Pontamur and his seconds have already alighted. Jean," added George, addressing the coachman, "don't go any further."

The carriage stopped. They alighted, and Dr. Coulanges drew from under the seat a case of surgical instruments, which he had never yet had occasion to use. "In case of accident," he whispered in Courtenay's ear, "the carriage can come up."

"I hope that ours will take all three of us back safe and sound," murmured George.

"We have no time to lose now," said Maurice Saulieu. "Those gentlemen have already gone across the fields. Don't let us keep them waiting."

George passed his arm through his friend's, and Coulanges had the tact to walk on ahead, thinking that the two friends might wish to be alone during the short walk they had to take before reaching the place of assignation.

"My dear Maurice," said George, "I am sure that you will emerge from this affair without a scratch, but you know that a duel with pistols is a regular lottery, and, in view of the very improbable chance of anything happening to you, I wish to ask if you have any instructions to give me?"

"On one point only, my dear fellow," responded Saulieu, firmly. "Promise me that if I am killed you will go in person and tell Marianne."

"Mademoiselle Mezenc, your betrothed! Ah! it would kill her if you were killed; and if you positively demanded that I should fulfil such a commission, I should do it through an intermediary. She has a mother, to whom I should first address myself."

"Her mother is in such a state of health that the least excitement would be fatal to her, as you yourself know very well."

"I know that she has been afflicted with paralysis of the legs for two years past, but the blow would be less severe to her than to her daughter."

"Perhaps; and yet I beg of you to do as I ask. I rely on your not refusing, and I have promised——"

"Whom? Marianne?"

"Yes, Marianne."

"She knows, then, that you are going to fight?"

"Yes, she knows it. I had to tell her."

"Dear me! I half believe I am dreaming. What! you adore that young girl, you would have married her long ago if you had had fortune enough for two; then, three months ago you inherited some money, and you immediately asked me to apply for Mademoiselle Mezenc's hand, which was accorded you without difficulty. You are now to be married after Easter; she loves you with all her heart, and yet you took it into your head to go and tell her that you meant to risk your life to-day! While you were in the vein of committing follies, you should have invited the poor girl to be present at the duel."

"I could not hide from her that I was going to fight."

George started. He began to have a glimmering of the truth. "Listen, Maurice," he said, in a voice which trembled a little, "I have purposely abstained from asking you why you picked a quarrel with Pontaumur, but if Mademoiselle Mezenc has been mixed up in this unfortunate affair in any fashion, you must tell

me, were it only to enable me to defend her if you should not be there. I feel for her as much esteem and friendship as——”

“As she feels for you,” interrupted Maurice; “I know it, my dear George; and I am certain that, if I miss him, you will not allow her to be insulted.”

“What? Has this fellow Pontaumur dared——”

“Well, not content with paying Marianne undesired attentions when he met her in society, he has said odious things about her—things which I did not hear, but which were repeated to me.”

“What did he say?”

“Spare me from telling you. It is better that you should always be ignorant of that, whatever happens. However, I did not wish that Marianne’s name should be mentioned in connection with a duel between this man and me. I therefore had no other choice than to act as I have acted—to insult the scoundrel publicly, and on the first pretext. I shall kill him, if Heaven is just; but he may kill me, and in that case I shall rely upon you.”

“To avenge you? I swear it.”

“No, that would awaken the memory of a slander which Pontaumur will not dare to repeat. But I rely upon you to protect that unfortunate young girl who will soon be alone in the world, for her mother has not long to live, and, if it were not for me, even her aunt, Madame Fresnay, would soon cease to have anything to do with her. However, here we are. Will you promise me to go and see Marianne if anything happens to me?”

“Well, yes, I promise; but I hope that you will pay her a visit in person. You are a wonderful shot, and you are perfectly cool. You will lodge a bullet in that knave’s heart. Ah! if I had only known the truth, I myself would have provoked him.”

“Gentlemen, they are waiting for us,” now said Coulanges, turning to the two friends, whom he was a few steps ahead of.

“Here we are,” responded Maurice Saulieu, quietly.

M. de Pontaumur and his friends were standing near the entrance of the old redoubt, which was surrounded by cultivated fields. The nearest house was between five and six hundred yards away.

M. Corléon carried the box which contained the pistols. He seemed rather nervous, this being, no doubt, the first time he had figured in an affair of honour. The other second was a retired officer, who was a member of the same club, and who had been present when the blow was struck. This latter had a bad opinion of the adversary of the friend he represented, and he did not hesitate to show it. As for M. de Pontaumur himself, he was a man approaching forty, and of Herculean build, but his overbearing stature did not prevent him having the appearance of a gentleman. He might even have passed for a handsome man, although his complexion lacked freshness, and his hair was getting slightly grey. He was no longer what is called “a lover,” in theatrical parlance,

but he might very well have played strong leading parts; and if he did not, as a rule, please men, on account of his haughty manners, he certainly did please those women who liked strength and massiveness. He had a "fatal air," as actors used to say in the old melodramas.

The two parties saluted each other coldly; the principals drew back a little, and the seconds approached one another to make the final preparations. "Gentlemen," commenced M. Corléon, in a serious tone, "I fear that it is too late to stop this duel, which we all deplore. However, my friend, Monsieur de Pontaumur, has commissioned me to make a last attempt at reconciliation. He is the insulted party, and his bravery is beyond question. He can, therefore, venture to express a desire for an arrangement, which——"

"Excuse me," interrupted George Courtenay; "I must, in the first place, call your attention to the fact that such a serious affair as this is cannot be compromised. We are not children. In the second place, I do not see how we could come to an understanding, unless your friend is content to accept the blow he received."

"You know as well as I do that he has the right to demand reparation. But if Monsieur Saulieu were willing, in our presence, to acknowledge that he acted wrongly——"

"Do you mean, to apologise?"

"Certainly. It seems to me that, in such a case, it is almost incumbent upon him to do so."

"It may seem so to you," retorted George, drily, "but it does not seem so to me. That Saulieu was too hasty is possible; but, in such a case, a man of honour can only submit to the consequences of his rashness."

"I may add," said Corléon, "that there would be nothing degrading in Monsieur Saulieu expressing his regret. We were all present at the scene which caused this meeting, and we should readily understand it if Monsieur Saulieu expressed regret for having unwarrantably attacked another member of the club."

"If Monsieur de Pontaumur would be satisfied with such a declaration, he cannot be very exacting."

"The apology would be mentioned in the report which we should draw up," added Captain Morgan, Pontaumur's second auxiliary.

"And which you would publish, of course. Come, gentlemen, all this is not serious. Let us end it, pray."

"You will not refuse, I hope, to submit our proposal to Monsieur Saulieu," said Corléon.

"I refuse categorically, because I feel certain that he would not accept it. If he had wished to make an apology, he would have begun by doing so. Now, however, it is too late. It is a pity, perhaps; but at the point we have now reached we must go on to the end."

"Permit me to say that you are taking a great responsibility upon yourself."

"A responsibility which does not weigh upon me at all. I know my friend's wishes, and I judge it useless to consult him. We have lost enough time already. Will you open that box?"

"Since you exact it. The doctor has the key."

"Yes, here it is," said M. Coulanges.

"It was a precaution which we both thought it best to take," added Corléon. "It is always necessary to equalise the chances of a duel. We bought the pistols and the ammunition together. The box was closed by Monsieur Coulanges, and you can see for yourself that it has not been opened since yesterday."

"I am quite convinced of it," growled George, shrugging his shoulders to show how ridiculous these precautions and speeches seemed to him.

"No one suspects you of tampering with it," added the doctor, impatiently.

Courtenay examined the pistols, assured himself that they had never previously been fired, that the bullets were of the right weight, poured a little powder into his hand, scrutinised it, and then said: "It is all right. I will measure the distance with Captain Morgan, while you load the weapons."

"With the doctor's help," said M. Corléon. "It is not proper for me to do it alone."

"Coulanges can load one of the pistols and you the other."

"That is what I meant. You see that we have selected old-fashioned muzzle-loading pistols. These are in various ways more reliable than cartridges previously prepared, and, as regards the fire, they are quite as accurate, too accurate, alas! for, at twenty paces and with fire-arms, a misfortune is often to be feared."

"We did not come here to fire into the air and breakfast together afterwards," replied Courtenay, brusquely. "Will you come with me, sir?" he added, addressing the captain, who replied: "I am at your orders. Still, if you are willing, I should prefer it if you would measure the distance. You are taller than I; your strides will be longer, and I presume that you will agree with me that it is not desirable to bring the combatants any nearer together than necessary."

"Certainly not. At the outset, I wished to place them thirty paces apart."

The ground was selected. By placing the adversaries face to face near the entrance of the old redoubt perfect equality was obtained as regards position. They had the sun on one side, and no wall or tree favoured the shot of one or the other. While George was pacing the ground, followed by Captain Morgan, M. Corléon and the doctor zealously discharged their duties. M. Corléon operated with minute care, and he understood the rather delicate task better than Coulanges did. Without him the latter would have forgotten to cleanse the muzzles of the pistols; and when, after this proceeding, they poured in the powder, Corléon showed the doctor



how to measure the charges so that they should be equal. He then absolutely insisted that Coulanges should choose the two bullets, and give him one. You would have said that he was afraid to select one of them for himself ; and, indeed, before putting the one given him into the pistol, he held it an instant between his thumb and fore-finger, as if to show that he did not slip it into his pocket. Coulanges, who did not attach much importance to all these details, only thought of carefully loading his own weapon.

The task was finished when the two other seconds returned, after marking the places by thrusting their canes into the ground.

"There is nothing more to be done, gentlemen," now said Corléon, "except to select the pistols. I will cover them with my handkerchief, and the adversaries can choose without seeing them."

"What is the use of such complicated arrangements ?" demanded Courtenay, out of temper. "We shall never end if we listen to you. You two were to prepare the weapons, and it is certain that everything was done correctly. We will decide, if you are willing, that your friend shall use the pistol loaded by the doctor, and that Saulieu shall use the other one. Give it to me ; I will take it to him. Captain Morgan, will you give Monsieur de Pontaumur the pistol which Monsieur Coulanges holds in his hand ?"

This having been arranged, the seconds separated.

"What did that imbecile mean by selecting the weapons from under a handkerchief ?" grumbled Courtenay, as he turned to join Maurice. "Does he take us for conjurors, and believe us capable of any trickery ?"

"No," said the doctor ; "but perhaps he isn't ignorant of the fact that he himself has been accused of cheating at cards, and he fears that he may be suspected of cheating on the duelling ground."

"Ah !" said Courtenay between his teeth, "we have to deal with a fine gentleman, and that fellow Pontaumur chooses his seconds well. One of them is as stiff as a ramrod, and the other does not inspire me with the least confidence. However, you watched the loading, and you are sure there was nothing underhand ?"

"Perfectly sure," affirmed the doctor. "I saw everything, and even selected the bullets myself."

"Well, all right. If no one is touched the first time I shall demand that the duties be inverted. The captain and I will load the pistols. Now, my dear fellow, I still have a word to say to Saulieu, and I shan't need you to conduct him to his post."

"Very well ; I will let you go, and remain here."

"Yes, I will join you again in a minute. This is a good place for the seconds."

Coulanges remained where he was ; Morgan and Corléon had joined their friend, and Courtenay now went towards Maurice, who was quietly waiting a short distance off. "All is ready," he said, handing him the pistol, which he had cocked. "The captain will give the signal, and he has promised me not to be too slow. You

know what you have to do : aim at the first command, and fire at the moment he pronounces the word three ! He will begin by saying, 'One ! two !' you understand ?"

"Yes."

"You must fire at once. A second sooner or later would be considered dishonourable."

"I know it."

"But there is no reason for you to preoccupy yourself about the signal. You will hear it plainly, and it is useless for you to keep your eye upon Morgan. Think only of aiming at your adversary, and try not to miss him. Now that I know the real motive of all this, I would give anything to fight in your place. For, after all, I don't amount to much, and my life isn't worth a song, whereas you are going to marry a charming young girl. However, don't let us talk any more of all that."

"Talk of it, on the contrary. I have your promise, old man, and I expect you to keep it."

"I repeat, since you exact it, that your wishes shall be carried out."

"I might have another request to make of you, only——"

"Another ! No, no ! No more of this talk now. It makes one's hand tremble, and prevents one taking aim properly. We will continue the conversation when you have stretched Monsieur de Pontaumur upon the ground ; for I don't doubt but what you will do so. You are cool, and at practice I have seen you hit the bull's-eye five times out of seven. You will at least break one of his ribs."

"What will be, will be. My cause is just, and I do not fear death. That is all that is necessary. But, without reverting to what you have promised to do if I am killed, I can tell you that in my pocket-book, here in my breast pocket, you will find some papers which I want you to read and examine."

"A will ? That was quite useless. But it is understood. Not a word more. This is the limit which you must not pass ; see my cane. Place yourself there. Your adversary is already at his post."

"I am ready. Give me your hand ; that is not forbidden by the code," said Maurice, smiling.

"No, old fellow, and I give it to you gladly, because it won't be the last time. You have pulled up your cuffs and turned up the collar of your coat, I see, to hide any spot of white. That is quite right ; and, above all, keep your side turned towards him. Ah ! one word more : the shot always rises, so aim at his knee to touch his heart. The trigger is a little stiff. Begin to pull gently when you hear the word 'Two.'"

"I understand. Farewell, George ; these gentlemen will be getting impatient. Do not delay any longer, or they will think that I am afraid and that you are bracing me up."

"Any one who said that would have to settle with me," replied George, quitting his friend.

The three other seconds had now taken up their positions on a little mound, which overlooked the field of combat. Coulanges was greatly moved. He liked Saulieu very much, and he was thinking of the dangerous effects of firearms, which mangle one even when they do not kill. M. Corléon, on his side, was agitated, and evinced even more uneasiness than he really felt, perhaps. As for the captain, he appeared very calm, and was so in reality.

"I rely on your not pausing too much between the words of command," whispered Courtenay to him.

M. Morgan responded by a gesture which signified: "Be easy, I know my business;" and then advancing a little, he exclaimed:

"Gentlemen, are you ready?"

The question was a simple formality, for the two combatants, each with his right shoulder forward and his pistol pointed to the ground, were awaiting the signal. It would have been impossible to decide which of the two was the calmer. Saulieu was a trifle pale, but he had the confident look of a man who feels no fear, and he carried his head erect. M. de Pontaurmur, firm upon his legs, held himself steady, with a frowning brow, and his eyes fixed upon his opponent. With his dark complexion, pronounced features, and bulky frame, he had the appearance of a bronze statue. His rather massive build was a marked disadvantage, for Maurice, being very slight, presented much less vulnerable surface.

"Go on, captain," murmured George, who was suffering cruelly from the anguish which even the bravest feel when the life of a dear friend is at stake.

Morgan uttered the first word of command in a deep, clear voice, and the weapons were raised at the same time. "One! two! three!" he cried, without leaving more than a second's interval between each word.

The two pistols were fired simultaneously, so that only one report was heard. Immediately afterwards, M. de Pontaurmur lowered his weapon. He was evidently not touched; but Saulieu let his pistol fall, and quickly raised his left hand to his breast. He remained standing, however, and Courtenay arrived in time to receive him in his arms. "You are wounded?" exclaimed George, in a hoarse voice.

"Yes, there, near the armpit," replied Maurice, with a shudder.

"It's nothing," exclaimed the doctor, running up. "Carry him, Courtenay, to the embankment over there. Lean upon me, my dear Saulieu."

They dragged him with difficulty some ten steps, and laid him down upon a grassy embankment. The wound could not be seen, but his face was livid, and his eyes were closed.

"Help me to loosen his clothes," said Coulanges, in a low tone. His hand trembled, and, in his hurry, he had dropped his case of instruments.

"Do you suffer?" asked George, anxiously.

"No, very little," gasped the wounded man; "but I am suffocating."

The doctor had unbuttoned his coat and waistcoat; a little blood stained the shirt, which he quickly tore open, whereupon a scarcely visible wound appeared, two inches below the collar-bone.

"Well?" eagerly asked George.

Coulanges responded by a shake of the head, which foreboded nothing good. Maurice did not see it, however.

M. de Pontaumur had joined his seconds, as is the custom in such cases. It was proper, however, that they should inquire as to the condition of the wounded man. M. Corléon and the captain approached first. Pontaumur followed behind them, and it was plain from his expression that he did not care to approach too near, for fear of finding himself face to face with a corpse.

"The wound is not serious, I hope," said Corléon, with a constrained air. And on the doctor making a gesture which signified that it was mortal, he threw up his hands, exclaiming: "Oh! my God! what a misfortune! You will do us this justice, gentlemen, that we did all that was possible to stop this duel, and that everything was carried out in an honourable manner."

"Go to the devil!" cried Courtenay, shaking his fist at him. "We don't want your jeremiads and protestations."

And as M. Corléon hastened to beat a retreat, Courtenay called Morgan, and said in a different tone: "Take your friends away, captain, and at the first inn you come to below there, near the bridge, send us two men with a stretcher and a mattress."

"Rely upon me, sir," answered the officer, with the phlegm of an old soldier, who had seen many such cases. "I will also give your coachman orders to advance."

Courtenay knelt down and raised the head of his friend, who had opened his eyes. "Maurice," he asked, "do you know me? It is I, George."

"You will go," murmured Maurice, in a voice which was barely a whisper, "you will go—you promised."

"I promise you again."

"Thanks, thanks! Lean over, George, nearer—nearer still."

"You hurt yourself. Do not speak, I implore."

"I must. I wish you to know all. Marianne——"

"Well, you will see her again. In two hours' time we shall be in Paris, and she will come to see you."

"No; I shall never see her again. But at least you shall know the secret which I did not dare to confide to you, and then she for whom I die will be saved."

"Yes; for you will live, and she loves you."

"No; it is you whom she loves," said Maurice, so low that George alone heard this strange avowal.

"What do you say?" he cried, in amazement.

But Maurice did not reply. These last words had cost him his life.

His head fell back, his eyes closed, and George saw the shadow of death pass like a veil over his young face.

"It is over," murmured Coulanges, releasing the hand which he had been holding. "The pulse has stopped. The heart no longer beats."

"But, good heavens! you have let him die! You have done nothing to save him!" cried George, with a movement of anger.

"There was nothing to do, I assure you. The bullet penetrated the upper lobe of the right lung, not very deeply, perhaps, for it passed through two or three garments, but it cut an artery, and internal hæmorrhage ensued. I had not a moment's hope after examining the wound. I am even astonished that the poor fellow could live as long as he did, and speak so much."

"Speak? Oh! he was not conscious of what he was saying; he was delirious."

"You are mistaken. He suffered horribly, but he died in full possession of his faculties. I, although I ought to be accustomed to such spectacles, feel completely upset."

"That is very apparent," said Courtenay. "You talk medicine instead of acting. Go and see if Jean is coming with the carriage, since your science is powerless."

"The carriage? You don't dream, I hope, of using it to take the body to Paris! We should be arrested on the way. If it were a closed carriage even. But it is open, and we haven't even anything to cover the face of our unfortunate friend."

"My coachman will give us the horse-rugs; and, besides, didn't you hear me ask the captain to send us some men with a mattress?"

"Morgan? He isn't worth any more than the other two, and if you rely upon him to help us——"

"The service which I asked of him is one which cannot be refused, even to an enemy, and this rough soldier isn't my enemy, although I do not fancy him."

"He is the friend of that fellow Pontaumur and that other fool."

"Corléon! Ah! the wretch! Just now, when he approached to ask me in such a sugary way if Saulieu were seriously hurt, I could have grabbed him by the throat and strangled him."

"I should have infinite pleasure in crossing swords with him, if I could only find the opportunity; but it is not worth while our bothering ourselves about him. It is upon the murderer that Maurice Saulieu's death must be avenged."

"Oh! I have more than one account to regulate with Pontaumur. I intend to make him pay dearly for that pistol-shot, and the rest besides," added George, between his teeth.

"Yes; I hope that the matter will not rest here, and that one of us will give him the lesson he deserves. The devil of it is that very few of the members of the club will take part against him."

"Why? Everybody detests him."

"Granted. But he was publicly struck; he was in the right,

and I fear that no one will pity our friend, who was the aggressor."

Courtenay was about to protest that the first wrong came from Pontaurmur, but he remembered in time that the secret was not his own, and he contented himself with a threatening gesture.

Courtenay had risen after seeing Saulieu expire in his arms. His heart failed him to sustain his friend's body, which was already disfigured by death. Still he could not take his eyes off it. It seemed to him that Maurice was going to speak, that with the hand he extended he was about to grasp his own. And he was seeking for the solution of the enigmatical words: "It is you whom she loves," which Maurice's white lips had uttered in their last gasp.

"Marianne Mezenc," he thought, striding up and down, "whom I scarcely know—she loves me? No, it is impossible! Maurice was delirious, whatever the doctor may declare; he did not know what he was saying; and yet he availed himself of his remaining strength to speak to me and confide this secret to me. That was his expression, and that was his last thought—a secret. Ah! yes, and a very impenetrable one, for I should never have suspected that there existed any mysterious bond between me and this young girl, and even now I do not believe it. She adored Saulieu, she was going to marry him, and I saw her but seldom in society, where that stuck-up creature, an aunt, took her. How under the sun could she have fallen in love with me? It is certainly not my fault if she has done so. She was engaged to Maurice; it was as if she had been my sister, and I never even told her that I thought her pretty."

While George was indulging in these reflections, the doctor, a little piqued by the reproaches which his comrade had addressed to him, applied his ear to Saulieu's breast to make sure that he was indeed dead, and he acquired full certainty that Maurice's heart had really ceased to beat. The blood no longer flowed from the small hole made by M. de Pontaurmur's bullet, and the prostrate body was already cold. "Ah! this duelling with pistols!" he muttered between his teeth, "it really ought to be forbidden! A thrust with a sword can be parried, and when it is received, it is not absolutely fatal, whereas these infernal leaden balls perforate a vital organ as easily as they would perforate a sheet of paper. I would bet, now, that this one is lodged quite near the spine, despite the coat, waistcoat, and shirt, and at such a distance it is unheard of, for George's twenty paces were equal to thirty. Ah! it was good powder that Monsieur Corléon weighed out with so much care, and if poor Saulieu had aimed better Pontaurmur would not have returned to Paris on his feet. Bah! what is the use of practising? In the shooting gallery Saulieu put twenty bullets into the target one after the other, but on the duelling ground he misses a man of the height and breadth of a grenadier. He wasn't nervous though, his hand did not tremble, but he must have fired hurriedly—that Morgan spoke so quickly."

"What shall we do now?" asked George. "Shall we wait here for the arrival of the men? I wonder if we had not better go and find them ourselves. The Saint-Ouen bridge is not far, and the carriage could take us there and back in twenty minutes."

"You are right. But it isn't necessary for us both to go. We cannot abandon our friend's body, although he is dead, alas! and my skill cannot restore him; but we must not leave him at the mercy of any passer-by. Saulieu must have money upon him and papers——"

"Yes, I remember that he spoke to me of a pocket-book and asked me to take it out of his pocket—the breast pocket."

"It seems to me that in opening his coat I felt something; and, between ourselves, he ought not to have retained that pocket-book, which might have saved him; it is forbidden by the code. Ah! here it is," said Coulanges, showing a large Russian leather pocket-book, which he had taken from the coat.

"Give it to me."

"Good Heavens! Look! It is perforated; Monsieur de Pontaumur's bullet has passed through it. This is marvellous; to think that I have heard stories of lives saved by a roll of manuscript! This pocket-book is choke full of letters and photographs, but it did no good. Open it and see what havoc the bullet has made."

"I shall soon know everything, since Maurice requested me to examine the contents."

"Wait! Here is a photo," cried the doctor, picking up a photograph which had fallen to the ground; "the portrait of a woman. See, the bullet has carried a bit of it away, there away from the breast, just above the heart. That is a sinister omen; the poor creature will die perhaps of grief when she learns that poor Maurice has been killed, and Monsieur de Pontaumur will be doubly a murderer."

George now snatched the portrait from the doctor's hand, and at a glance recognised the features of Mademoiselle Mezenc, his friend's betrothed. It was true. The likeness was pierced in the breast, almost in the same place as Saulieu had been hit, and this strange coincidence impressed George like a presentiment of misfortune. "Only my heart remains to be pierced," he thought. "And who knows? That woman must be fatal to all those who love her or whom she loves. However, I do not love her, I shall never love her, and I doubt very much if she has any feeling for me; she has certainly never shown it."

"Do you know, Courtenay," now said Coulanges, "if everything in that pocket-book has been pierced through, you will find some hiatuses in the documents. Our friend's will is perhaps there, and a will to which the signature is lacking would be quite worthless."

"Who cares about his will?" exclaimed George, tartly. "I do not expect to be his heir, nor you either. He has relations, distant ones, it is true; but, at all events, his money won't find its way into the coffers of the State, and, for my own part, I would gladly throw

this pocket-book, which is stained with Maurice's blood, into the Seine."

"You will not do that, I hope. You would be cheating some one, perhaps."

"Some one!" repeated George gravely. "Yes, a woman, perhaps: a woman who has caused his death."

"What!" cried the doctor, "the original of that portrait? Was she the cause of this unfortunate duel?"

"I did not say that," replied Courtenay, angrily. "You are dreaming, and I spoke at random. We are both losing our heads, and, in truth, there is some reason for it. Let us carry the body of our friend away. I imagine at times that he hears us. My carriage is over there, and the coachman is making signs that he sees somebody upon the road. Morgan has performed his duty, no doubt, and the men are coming. What shall we do? I think that we can't return to Paris escorting a dead body."

"Especially the body of a man killed in a duel. There are formalities to be fulfilled or we may get ourselves into a bad scrape. For instance, the police must be informed, and the mayor of the locality, and a doctor's certificate must be handed in stating the cause of the death. If we disappeared without saying anything we should expose ourselves to arrest; and I am by no means sure that we shall not be arrested anyhow."

"Bah! It is a long time since any seconds have been sent to the assizes, unless the duel was an unfair one."

"It was not so in this case. But remember, Courtenay, that a man has been killed, and that so seldom happens."

"Well, let them arrest Pontaumur. I shouldn't be sorry to see him condemned to a term of imprisonment."

"And I should be extremely vexed, for we ourselves should get six months, and perhaps more, which would not be cheerful."

"What, we who saw our friend killed by that man! That would be absurd!"

"The law does not allow of any distinction between the seconds; it considers them as accomplices, whichever side they belong to. Saulieu fired at Pontaumur, and, although he did not hit him, you and I are accomplices."

"We only did our duty, and I, for my part, shall know how to defend myself."

"So shall I, but, believe me, if this matter comes before a jury we shall be greatly blamed by the public prosecutor, whereas Corléon and Morgan will be treated with indulgence, Corléon especially."

"Why, pray?"

"You forget that he made us a proposal to arrange matters, and you would not listen to anything of the sort. You even refused to inform our friend of the suggestion."

"It would have been quite useless, and they knew perfectly well that Maurice would not accept their conditions. By demanding an



apology which he could not make without dishonouring himself, they had no other end in view than to make a show of moderation."

"And to put you in the wrong. They succeeded, too. You may be sure that Corléon will tell every one, and especially the members of the club, that he made prodigious efforts to prevent the duel, and that you were intractable; he will paint you as a wild animal thirsting for gore, and declare that, in reality, it was you who killed Saulieu."

"If he says that, he will have to answer to me for his words."

"Another duel! that would be worse still, for you would be considered a perfect bully, determined on fighting."

"Doctor, are you trying to drive me wild with your predictions?" exclaimed Courtenay, in exasperation. "I have quite enough trouble and worry without your nonsense. Let them accuse me, arrest me, send me to the galleys, if they like; but just now I want to think of the present situation. To settle matters more quickly, I am going with Jean to meet the men, and I shall bring them here in the carriage; we will help them to remove Maurice and will accompany them to the nearest house, where we will leave the body. Then you can take the carriage and make the proper declarations to the authorities; I shall take the first train to Paris, although I have nothing agreeable to do there, I assure you. Still, I promised poor Maurice to do something for him, and to-morrow I shall have other sad duties to fulfil, the funeral to see to, the notary to advise, and——"

"That is true. Saulieu lived alone, and you were the only person he was intimate with; he has probably appointed you his executor?"

"Heaven forbid! Besides, he has some relatives in the country."

"Was he not to be married shortly? He never spoke to me about it, you know how uncommunicative he was, but, according to popular report, he was going to make a love-match with a girl without any dowry."

"Popular report, indeed! It says many things which are not true, and this isn't the time to occupy ourselves with any foolish opinions. I am going."

"And I will wait for you here. One of us must remain. Don't lose any time."

While talking, they had walked slowly along and had reached the spot where they had stood to witness the encounter. Coulanges had dropped his case of instruments there, and in the excitement he had forgotten all about it. "It was indeed a fine thing to bring those things," said Courtenay, touching the case with his foot, as he left the doctor to his reflections, which were certainly not pleasant ones.

Coulanges loved a quiet life, and he had a horror of unexpected complications. He prized his own comfort above everything, and he must have thought a great deal of Maurice to have consented to act as one of his seconds. He would certainly have refused, could

he have foreseen the end of the matter. But duels with pistols consist, nine times out of ten, in a harmless exchange of shots ; the seconds declare that honour is satisfied, they bow, sometimes shake hands, and then depart as they came. 'Powder has spoken,' as the Arabs say, and that is an end of the matter. The newspapers announce on the morrow that M. de P. and M. S. bore themselves with bravery, and the friends who assisted them benefit in their turn from the notoriety attaching to the affair.

Coulanges had fancied that he would be quit with an excursion to the suburbs of Paris, and he had brought his instruments as a mere matter of form. However, he had fallen upon a hopeless case, one of those frightful accidents which have such terrible consequences. He now had a dead man on his hands, and the court of assizes in prospect; and he inveighed against Courtenay, who had had the unfortunate idea of asking him for his services. "He seemed to be angry with me," he thought. "Just now he almost reproached me for not attempting an operation upon a man who expired a few minutes after being hit. This will teach me not to put myself out to oblige friends, who would not do the same for me. I liked Saulieu, and Courtenay is a good fellow, but there is no reason for me to mix myself up in their affairs. Saulieu was in the wrong, too, and Courtenay only fanned the flames. It rested with him to prevent this duel taking place ; but no, thanks to his folly, here am I in a ridiculous position, and with at least twenty-four hours of annoyance before me. I was going to dine this evening at the *Café Anglais* with some charming people, and now I shall dine, perhaps, all alone in some tavern at Saint-Ouen or Gennevilliers, for the authorities won't let me go this evening. Then what a life there will be before me, even if the seconds are not arrested and tried. The club will be divided into two camps ; some will defend Saulieu's memory, others will sustain Pontaurmur. One won't be able to sit down to a whist-table without being exposed to a quarrel. Ah ! I have prepared an agreeable existence for myself."

Thus did Coulanges grumble as he put his case in his pocket ; and yet he was not an egotist in the bad sense of the word. He was simply a practical philosopher, a good-natured fellow, who thought of himself first, but who also thought of others, and obliged them willingly, when he could do so without troubling himself too much. He was kind-hearted by nature, and he liked to be surrounded by happy people, but he had his own idea of felicity, and it did not occur to him that other people had different ones.

He saw Courtenay drive away in the carriage, and, while awaiting his return, he paced up and down, gradually drawing further and further away from the spot where the body lay. The ground was even, and the dryness of an exceptional winter had hardened the soil and blighted the straggling grass which grew in this abandoned corner of the plain.

"Here is a battle-field which has not retained the least trace of

the combat," thought Coulanges. "I am exactly in the line of fire. Pontaurmur was there, quite near, on the left, and Saulieu over there on the right. A short time ago this would not have been a good place for me to stand. Bullets don't get out of the way to avoid imprudent persons. Pontaurmur's, alas, went straight to its goal. What has become of poor Maurice's? It must have fallen far off; he fired too high. But no," he suddenly exclaimed, stooping down to examine more closely an object which he perceived at his feet, "he fired, on the contrary, too low, for here it is. Yes, it is indeed a bullet; it is visible enough; it hasn't even penetrated the ground. That is extraordinary. The ground is harder than a man's skin, no doubt, but it hasn't the resistance of an iron plate; and besides, bullets become flattened when they strike against an impenetrable surface, and this one has preserved its spherical form. Now, why the devil did it fall so softly, and why didn't it go further? The powder was good; Saulieu was nearly shot through the body, and he aimed well, for although his bullet did not reach the mark it did not deviate from the straight line. I should like to know the cause of this phenomenon, for I don't understand it."

The doctor remained for some time contemplating the bullet, but did not think of picking it up. He looked about him, as if an inspection of the ground would furnish him with an explanation of the riddle. "Dear me! What a fool I am!" he suddenly cried, striking his forehead. "Where was my mind? This bullet did not come from Saulieu's pistol, for the very good reason that it never entered it. Corléon must have let it fall when he was loading the weapon. He was so nervous that he did not know what he was about, and he may have badly rammed the bullet into the pistol. This would explain why our friend did not hit his adversary. Ah! the monk of the Middle Ages who invented powder may flatter himself with having made a fine discovery! Formerly, at all events, it was only used in warfare, the knights who had a quarrel settled it with lance or rapier, with anything except pistols. People only commenced to use that villanous weapon under Louis XIII., and even then they fought on horseback and wore breastplates."

Coulanges was at this point of his denunciation of modern customs when behind a tuft of dry grass he perceived a wooden box. "Ah!" he said to himself, "so Corléon has forgotten the pistol-case, and, indeed, I don't see why he should have taken it away, for it is mine; I paid for it out of my own pocket. The devil! it was a fine way to lay out my money! And to think that I have at home a superb pair of swords, and these gentlemen would not use them! I have a great mind to bury these cursed pistols; but no, I will keep them. They will make me remember all my life that I had the weakness to assist a friend who had accepted such absurd conditions, and it will stop my ever doing such a thing again. But are the pistols in the box? Saulieu dropped his on the spot where he was hit, but Pontaurmur must have given his to one of his seconds."

Coulanges picked up the box, opened it, and was a little surprised to see that the two pistols were inside. They had been placed in their sockets of green cloth, and were even arranged so carefully that one would have thought they never had been taken out.

"Those seconds kept their heads," muttered the doctor, who was a born reasoner. "One of them must have taken the trouble to go and pick up the weapon which Saulieu dropped. I did not notice it, but I had something else to think of. Well, a man must be singularly organised to think of collecting the weapons at the moment when a person has been mortally wounded; he might as well have cleaned them while he was about it. I am not quite so calm as all that, and when I think that one of these implements has killed a good-hearted fellow whom I saw every day; when I think that it was I who loaded it, it seems to me that I shall never dare to touch it. I should not be sorry, though, to know which one it was; I would place a mark upon it to recognise it, and I should only have to look at it now and then to keep myself in a state of holy horror against duelling with pistols at a distance of twenty paces."

Impelled by his praiseworthy indignation, and a little, too, by curiosity, Coulanges took the pistols, one after the other, out of the box, and began to examine them with some repugnance. They were absolutely alike, and the muzzle of each was blackened with powder. The only peculiarity he noticed was that one of them was, perhaps, a trifle more greasy than the other, but that was of really no importance. He finally placed them in the box, closed the latter up, and aimlessly retraced his steps.

It happened that he again perceived the fallen bullet, and this time he stooped down to pick it up. However, when he took it between his fingers, he suddenly started and exclaimed: "Dear me! it weighs nothing. It certainly isn't made of lead. What does this mean?"

On examining it more closely, he indeed found that it was simply made of wood, perfectly spherical, and covered with a thin layer of that metallic paper which people wrap about sweets and chocolate, and which has the colour and brightness of new lead. It had been fashioned so skilfully that its mere appearance would have deceived any one. It was only by its weight that the difference from a real bullet could be detected. "What a singular plaything!" muttered the doctor between his teeth; "who has left it here and what was it used for? It has soiled my fingers, too, and——"

He raised it to his nose and recognised the smell of powder. Then he at last began to understand.

"Ah! the scoundrels!" he cried; "the cowards! They have murdered Saulieu. Yes, this false bullet was in his pistol, while Pontaurmur fired at him with a real one. That is why Corléon wished to load one of the pistols himself. How did he manage it?"

I was there, and the bullet I gave him was certainly not made of wood, I am sure of it. He must have substituted another one which he held concealed in his hand. Why not? It is said that he cheats at cards, and one evening when some fellows were throwing dice at the club a loaded die was found under the table, which he was suspected of having used. When he held the box, he substituted it for a good one; and he has repeated much the same game here. It wasn't a difficult job; I was not watching him. I did not imagine that I had to deal with a scoundrel, though I know it now. I will denounce him, and if he is not condemned to death, it won't be my fault; yes, to death, and Pontaurmur too, and Morgan too, for those rascals were his accomplices."

At this point Coulanges paused in his monologue. He was easily excited, but reason quickly returned to him. He commenced to reflect: "His accomplices? I am not quite sure of that; I am even inclined to think the contrary of the captain; an old officer does not connect himself with a brigand. As for Pontaurmur, however, that is another thing; the crime has profited him, yet nothing in his past justifies an imputation of this nature. Besides, how could I prove it? Or even prove that that infamous fellow Corléon did anything out of the way? It would be of no use for me to show the bullet; no one would believe that it came from Saulieu's pistol, and that Corléon prepared it. No one saw me pick it up. If Courtenay had been here when I did so, we should have been two to swear to the fact; but that would not be sufficient; people would still laugh in our faces, and we should be considered slanderers. And then, how to proceed? File an accusation? In that case, we should certainly be brought before the assizes as seconds. No! no! I do not want that sort of satisfaction. I like peace of mind too much to embark in a criminal trial; and Courtenay would certainly make a row if I showed him what I have found. The devil! I had better keep it to myself. Why not, after all? If I acted now I should risk making a mistake, for after all I am not sure that Pontaurmur is guilty. Isn't it wiser to wait and observe the way these men behave? Perhaps they will end by betraying themselves, and, by keeping the bullet, I shall always be armed against them."

Upon arriving at this conclusion, Coulanges put the accusing ball in his waistcoat pocket, not, however, without asking himself if he conscientiously had the right to conceal the matter. It cost him something to acknowledge to himself that his petty sin, his exaggerated love of repose, had a deal to do with the prudent resolution he had taken, but he succeeded at last in persuading himself that "When in doubt, keep still," was the most sensible of all proverbs. It must be said, also, in his excuse, that certain particulars of the preliminaries of the duel did not agree with the supposition of pre-meditated assassination. For instance, Corléon had proposed that the combatants should select the pistols from under a handkerchief. If this system had been adopted, Pontaurmur would have been ex-

posed to choosing the inoffensive weapon, and the situation might have been reversed.

Coulanges congratulated himself on thinking of this, and yet a solution soon presented itself to his mind; one of the pistols might bear a mark, trifling, no doubt, but recognisable to the touch. Then M. de Pontaumur could have chosen with certainty, and in that case there could be no doubt of his complicity; for, in order to profit by the mark, it must have been pointed out to him beforehand. The doctor was about to open the box to inspect the weapons more carefully than he had done the first time, when he saw George Courtenay coming toward him, followed by two men bearing a stretcher. He decided for the present to keep silent as to the discovery he had made, and consequently deferred his examination till a more favourable moment.

"All is arranged," said George, as he came up. "These good people will take care of the body of our poor friend. You will remain to be present at the inquiry, and I shall return to Paris. You need not complain of your task, for I have a much harder one to fulfil, and one that there is no escape from. Maurice made me promise to attend to it this evening."

## II.

WHEN George Courtenay alighted from the railway carriage in which he journeyed to Paris, he was in a very bad humour. The talk with the people at the Saint-Ouen inn had been prolonged beyond measure. He had been obliged to explain matters to the corporal of gendarmes, to sign a preliminary report, give his name and address, and promise to appear before the local authorities whenever his presence should be required. It had been useless to say that Dr. Coulanges would remain to answer. He had been forced to tarry three-quarters of an hour, and, to complete his misfortunes, he had lost the train at Asnières.

These accumulated annoyances had so irritated him that his sorrow was less keen at having seen his best friend die in his arms. Man is so constituted that the pricks of a pin make him momentarily forget great misfortunes. And George, when he reached Paris, was not at the end of his minor troubles. Everything fell upon him: the duty of informing Maurice Saulieu's relations, the preparations for the funeral, and a hundred other details which follow upon death, especially when death comes suddenly. And it is much worse when the victim has led the isolated existence of a bachelor, who has been an orphan from infancy.

This was precisely Maurice Saulieu's case. His mother had died when he was born, and he was not twelve years old when he lost his father, an old soldier, who had not grown rich in the service, and who had dreamed of making a soldier of his son. His mother had a little fortune, something like a hundred thousand francs, and this small capital, wisely administered by Commandant Saulieu, and subsequently by an honest guardian, had assured Maurice his independence, and enabled him to live without following what in France is called "a career." And Maurice had done so, to the great regret of his only surviving near relative, a brother of his mother's, an old merchant who had made a snug little fortune in trade. This uncle, however, although disapproving of idleness, had not ceased to care for his nephew, and, when he died, he had left him all his property.

Thus Maurice had lived alone from the time he left college, remaining in Paris, while his uncle lived in the country. They saw each other once a year, when the nephew went shooting in Burgundy. And in the capital Maurice had no other friend than George Courtenay, his old school-fellow, whom he saw constantly, although they did not live at all the same sort of life. Coulanges

was only a club acquaintance, and a very recent one, for it was only the year before that Saulieu had been received among the "Mouchérons" (little flies), the nickname given to the set of club-men to which the doctor and Courtenay belonged.

Coulanges had, therefore, done more than his duty in acting as Saulieu's second, and in remaining at the inn where the body had been temporarily placed. The other duties devolved upon George, who was bent upon fulfilling them. The most painful one was assuredly that which consisted in keeping the promise given to his dying friend. To inform a young girl that her lover has been killed in a duel is always a sad and difficult task; and this task, which George had unwillingly accepted, troubled him extremely since the strange confession which Maurice had made to him before expiring.

Courtenay had often met Mademoiselle Mezenc in society, but he had never shown her any attention; not, however, that he did not like her, for he thought her charming, as indeed she was. He did not keep away from her because her sole fortune consisted of her beauty, grace, and wit; nor because she was reserved towards him almost to coldness. He was rich; he cared nothing for a dowry, and difficult enterprises tempted him. But Maurice loved Mademoiselle Mezenc passionately, and had asked for her hand in marriage. This was enough for George to treat her as if she were already Madame Saulieu.

This situation had come to an end since her lover was dead; but George never dreamed of availing himself of Maurice's declaration to become a suitor for Mademoiselle Mezenc's hand. He did not even believe in that declaration, made by a wounded man who was in no condition to express his thoughts clearly. George imagined that Maurice, in saying: "She loves you," did not mean to give these words the meaning which is generally attributed to them when one speaks to a man about a woman. Still, they rang in his ears, and they troubled him, despite his resolution not to take them in earnest.

He realised that the memory of these unexpected farewell words would deprive him of the calmness he greatly needed to announce the frightful news; and for nothing in the world would he have wished the young girl to divine what singular embarrassment he felt. And he could not forget, also, that Mademoiselle Mezenc had been the cause of the terrible duel; it was for her sake that Maurice had fallen, struck by M. de Pontaurmur's bullet. If she had not complained of this man, Maurice would not have struck him. Did she deserve that Maurice should give her his last thought, leave her his fortune, perhaps, and recommend her to his best, his only friend? For the dead man's final sentence was a recommendation, almost a prayer. It was as if he had bequeathed his betrothed to George, and George did not feel disposed to accept the legacy. The idea of succeeding Maurice in Mademoiselle Mezenc's affections filled him with a sort of horror.



He resolved to make no allusion in her presence to the last words of the poor fellow who had laid down his life for her. But could he also be silent as to the true cause of the encounter? Could he feign to believe that Maurice had fought on account of a remark which was scarcely offensive, when, on the contrary, he had boldly assumed the part of an aggressor simply that no one should know the words which she herself had repeated to him, without foreseeing, perhaps, that Maurice would think himself obliged to avenge her?

After asking himself these questions fully twenty times, without finding any answer to them, George resolved to let himself be guided by circumstances, and not to broach delicate subjects, unless he were forced to that course by Mademoiselle Mezenc's attitude or language. The trial would soon be over, moreover; and he would have gone immediately to her house, if he had not thought that it would be as well first of all to examine the papers left by Saulieu. This examination would not take him long, but he did not like to make it in a railway carriage, with other passengers sitting near him. The pocket-book stained with blood, and perforated with the murderous bullet, was in his pocket; but he would have thought he was committing a sacrilege had he opened it before the eyes of strangers.

Besides, Mademoiselle Mezenc lived with her mother in the Rue Blanche, and Courtenay, who resided in the Rue de Milan, could, without much delay, go home for an instant before paying his visit. The house he occupied was not a large one, but it belonged to him, and he lived in certain style. Three horses, two carriages, a coachman, a groom, a valet, a cook, and a chamber-maid—these were the adjuncts of his establishment, which was scarcely that of a man who enjoyed an income of one hundred thousand francs a year, as Courtenay did.

On leaving the station he jumped into the first cab he saw and drove home. The valet and chamber-maid were talking in the courtyard, and, from their faces, George at once divined that they knew where he had been. The preparations for a duel can hardly be hidden from servants, and, besides, the coachman, when ordered to be ready at noon, had spoken to the others, who had also remarked the repeated calls of two gentlemen who had never previously been seen at the house, without counting the visits of M. Saulieu and Dr. Coulanges. However, Courtenay was not at all disposed to inform his people of what had occurred on the plain of Gennevilliers, and they, of course, did not dare to question him. "Are there any letters for me?" he asked.

The idea had struck him that perhaps Mademoiselle Mezenc had written to him. She must have known that the meeting would take place at about three o'clock, and she might have thought of asking Maurice Saulieu's intimate friend for news.

"No, sir, there have been none since this morning," answered the valet.

"Very well. I am at home to no one, and I am going out again

almost immediately. I shall be in the smoking-room. Get everything ready in my dressing-room ; I shall be there in five minutes."

He did not think of dressing for his painful visit as one dresses for dinner, but it did not seem to him proper to present himself before Maurice's betrothed in the same garments as he had worn on the duelling ground.

"Madame Bréhal called in her carriage on her way back from the Bois," said the valet.

"When was that?"

"About an hour ago. She asked if you had returned, sir, and told me to say that she would be at home this evening."

"This evening? But this is not her day!" murmured George.

He had his reasons for being astonished by a circumstance which ordinarily would have appeared natural enough. Madame Bréhal, who had driven out of her way expressly to invite George Courtenay to come and see her, was not his betrothed, but she held a place in his life, a great place even, for two days never went by without his seeing her. Now, the evening before, realising that the preliminaries and perhaps the consequences of Maurice's duel would absorb all his time, George had written to Madame Bréhal that unexpected business would take him away from Paris till the end of the week. The meeting had to be kept as secret as possible, and he had therefore been obliged to invent an excuse to explain his absence to Madame Bréhal, who expected his visits between five and six, without speaking of her Wednesday teas, at which he was almost always present.

He now guessed that the excuse had not deceived the lady, since she had stopped, on her way from the Bois, at his house in the Rue de Milan. If she had thought that George was out of town, she would not have taken the trouble to do so, nor would she have told the valet that she should expect his master that evening.

"She must know what has occurred, and she wishes to speak to me about it," thought George, giving his hat and overcoat to his valet. "How can she be so well informed? It is true that the whole club knew of the blow, and Madame Bréhal sees a good many people. She even received Pontaurmur sometimes. Could he have told her? No, that is impossible! A man does not boast of having been struck. No matter; I shall tell her what I think of that gentleman, and advise her not to receive him. I will go to see her this evening, since she has asked me to do so, and I shall be very glad to see her, for I always feel at ease with her; but now I must make a much less pleasant call, and there is very little time left me to prepare for it."

As already stated, he did not wish to present himself at Mademoiselle Mezenc's before opening Maurice's pocket-book, for it might contain written instructions. On the ground, as he was going to his post, Maurice had expressly requested his friend to look over the papers in his pocket-book. He had simply said papers; but it

was natural to suppose that among these documents would be found a will, and George was convinced that this will would constitute Mariannc Mezenc his friend's universal legatee. And this, moreover, he considered perfectly proper.

Maurice only had some distant relatives, who lived in comfortable circumstances in the provinces. Marianne, without being absolutely poor, was by no means rich. By marrying Saulieu she would have made an advantageous match. No one, therefore, could see anything wrong in it, or even be astonished, if he had left her his fortune, to console her for his loss. Had he lived, he would have raised her from the dull sphere in which she vegetated, between a sick mother and an aunt by marriage, who had constituted herself her protectress, and who made her pay dearly enough for her protection.

"If he has left his fortune to the girl he loved he has done quite right," thought Courtenay; "and my mission will be a little less painful to fulfil, supposing I can at the same time tell her that she has inherited a fortune. And yet it seems to me that she would feel some repugnance in accepting it; for after all she will owe this fortune to her lover's murderer—that Pontaurmur, whom I encounter everywhere. What would she do if she met him? And she will meet him, for he is received by Madame Fresnay, who is her chaperon. It was probably there that he made the remarks which Maurice heard of, to his misfortune. Well," concluded Courtenay, "that is her affair. She is very intelligent and very courageous. She will know what to do. All that I hope is that Saulieu has not chosen me as his executor, for that wouldn't suit me at all."

While he was thus thinking, he took the pocket-book out of his pocket, and gazed at it with tears in his eyes. The hole was as clearly defined as if the Russian leather had been perforated with a punch, and it seemed to him as if he could still see the wound made in his friend's breast by the bullet.

"Come! come!" he murmured, "no weakness! I must proceed, and examine these blood-stained papers."

He opened the pocket-book, which was fastened by a steel clasp and divided into several compartments. In the middle there was a little memorandum book and a pencil. Courtenay then again saw the pierced photograph, and took it up to look at it. It was admirably finished, and the resemblance was striking. The face was lovely enough to have tempted a painter. "She is like one of Raphael's Virgins," thought Courtenay. "It is exactly like her; it seems as if she were going to speak. And the eyes—no, the eyes are not so good; there is something lacking in them, I don't know what; or, rather, I do know—they have not that sparkle which is the characteristic mark of Marianne's beauty; but it would be impossible to get that in a photo. The rest is perfect; the bullet only touched the breast; and, after all, if the eyes are calm—well, on the day when Mademoiselle Mezenc sat she was very happy. The date is here, December 23, 1883, and her name below, written in her own

hand. The writing is characteristic, fine and bold ; at once elegant and firm. I remember that twenty-third of December ; Maurice was to go with me the next day to Madame Bréhal's, and he came in the morning to excuse himself and to tell me that he was engaged to be married ; he wanted to be alone to dream of his happiness, and I did not see him for four days. Poor fellow ! He little thought that, three months afterwards, nothing would remain of this deep love but a memory, and that Marianne would be a widow before being a wife. What will she do with this portrait ? Will she keep it, or will it inspire her with fear by constantly recalling the horrible catastrophe which has blighted her life ? She will burn it, perhaps ; burn it to forget, for at her age one forgets—that is in nature. If I dared, I would keep this portrait which the bullet damaged before killing Saulieu. But I have no right to do so ; and then, what would Mademoiselle Mezenc think, if she should ever learn that I had confiscated it ? She might think—— The devil ! I must return it to her." And so as to see it no longer, Courtenay replaced it in the pocket-book.

His valet had gone to prepare everything in the dressing-room, and George, alone in the large vestibule, had no need to enter the smoking-room to finish examining his friend's papers. The first he unfolded was a carefully compiled list of various amounts which Saulieu owed to his tradespeople. He must have written it out on the night before the duel, for recent purchases were specified, together with the dates. The list mentioned also the amount of money in his desk, and the amount to his credit at his banker's. Saulieu had evidently taken his precautions in view of the transmission of his property to some one mentioned in another paper.

"The will is probably in this," said George, taking out an envelope.

It was addressed to him and firmly sealed. To tell the truth, it had merely the appearance of a letter, and it was not surprising that Maurice should have written some words of farewell to his dearest friend, in case there should be an accident. However, the bullet had made a hole in the very middle of the envelope.

"Humph !" ejaculated Courtenay, "the fears which the doctor expressed are beginning to assail me. Heaven grant that the will is not in this envelope, for the brutal bullet may very well have destroyed the signature, and then what would become of Maurice's last wishes ?"

He hastened to break the seal, and, when he unfolded the paper, he saw at the first glance that the writing ended with this sentence :

"Be happy, and think sometimes of the friend who cared so much for you."

Courtenay drew a long breath ; the document was only a letter, and he hastened to read it. It commenced as follows : "My dear Friend,—I do not wish to impose upon you the task of attending to my affairs when I shall be no more. I only ask you to give my

notary my will, which is in proper form, and fully expresses my last wishes. You will find it in the ——”

The end of the sentence was missing. The bullet had carried it away. “The devil!” murmured George, “this is almost as bad as if the bullet had carried away Maurice’s signature itself. He has written: ‘You will find it in the ——’ and the rest is gone. In the what? In the house? In the room? In the box? There are a hundred places where he might have put it. He has not deposited it with his notary, since he asks me to take it to him. Where can he have put it? That is a question which I am not yet in a position to solve. Let us see if the rest of the letter will help me on the point.”

Before continuing, he carefully examined the hole, and saw that the end of the missing sentence could not have been long, half a line at the most. The next sentence was the beginning of a fresh paragraph. In this also some words were lacking, but the meaning was more or less intelligible: “The will which I have —— to you, without —— I made yesterday, after mature reflection, and although one of the clau— may appear strange to you, I am almost cer— you will approve of it, and I beg you to instantly make yourself acqu— with its contents before ——”

“That does not clear up matters much,” thought Courtenay. ‘The will which I have ——’ that seems to be, which I have confided to you, and yet Maurice has confided nothing to me, except that at the last moment he revealed the secret motive of the duel. ‘Without ——’ I don’t understand that at all. ‘One of the clau—,’ clauses, that is evident. It may appear strange to me, I admit that; I shall approve of it, possibly; but I am no better informed. I don’t know what the clause is. I should not be surprised if it concerned Mademoiselle Marianne. The poor fellow thought of nobody but his sweetheart. And the rest is no less obscure. ‘To make yourself acquainted with it before ——’ before taking it to the notary? No; I certainly should not go to ask him about it afterwards. Besides, it is easy to see that there are more than six words missing. What are they? It would need a magician to find out. The savants who restored the text of Tacitus would be at their wits’ end here. Now as to the rest? Ah! the rest consists of a very short paragraph, which does not throw the least light on the meaning of the two preceding ones. Maurice asks my pardon for the trouble and embarrassment he is about to cause me; he invokes as an excuse the memory of our long and warm friendship, and wishes me every happiness. Of Mademoiselle Mezenc there is not a word; but that is no reason why she shouldn’t be mentioned in the will. And all this obscurity would be nothing if I knew where that will was; but I haven’t the slightest idea of its whereabouts. Ah! Monsieur de Pontaurmur may congratulate himself on having done all the evil he could. With one shot, he has killed my best friend, and rendered it impossible for me to fulfil his last wishes. What shall I do?

What shall I say to Mademoiselle Mezenc? Shall I show her this letter? No, she could make no more of it than I can."

George sadly replaced the letter in the envelope, and the envelope in the compartment in which he had found it. There were no more papers. He opened the memorandum book, to see if there might be any explanation there, but there were only some very cursory notes, which told him nothing: dates marked with a cross, abbreviated words and initials, especially those of his betrothed. It was the note book of a lover, who only thinks of his love affairs, and who recalls by signs, which he alone understands, the memory of his meetings with his sweetheart. Upon one of the last pages, two lines, almost effaced, seemed to be clearer: "To-day, March 27th, I have guessed the secret. I will have a decisive understanding——" And a little below, with the date of March 29th, came the words: "Courage has failed me. And, then, what would be the use? I no longer doubt my misfortune. I shall die of it. I must——"

The hand holding the pencil had trembled in tracing the last words.

What was the meaning of this sentence? What sentiment had impelled Maurice to write it? Maurice had been neither excitable nor romantic. Whatever he did, he did simply; and he had never needed a memorandum to recall one of those crises which upset a whole existence. Still less had he needed to excite himself to act against an enemy or rival. He had been the quietest and yet the most resolute of men, firm in his plans and brave, like those who make but little bluster. And yet, strange to say, he had noted down his impressions, like a young girl who has just entered society, and who continues to keep her journal after leaving a boarding school.

"How foolish of him," thought George, "to jot down all his thoughts in this way. Still, if they were comprehensible, I should not regret having read them, for they would tell me perhaps what I ought to say to his betrothed, and what manner I ought to assume in dealing with her. But now I must trust to chance, and proceed in the dark. What was this discovery made by Maurice on the 27th of March? Where was he that day? I cannot remember what I did myself. Did I see Maurice on the 27th of March? Probably I did; we rarely went twenty-four hours without seeing one another; but it is certain that our interview on that date made no particular impression upon me. And then, 'the secret?' Whose secret? Not mine, certainly. I have no secrets. I never had any, especially with Maurice. I have even told him that I was afraid I should fall in love with Madame Bréhal. A man's secret probably, since he intended to come to a decisive understanding. I would rather decipher the hieroglyphics of an obelisk than puzzle my head over these sentences. What is very clear, however, is that my poor friend foresaw that he was going to die, and did not care to live. His 'misfortune,' that was evidently the certainty he felt of not being loved. Ah! if I had only known!"

This monologue was interrupted by the valet, who came to inform George that the dressing-room was ready for him. The interruption was a timely one, for Courtenay had had enough of these papers which told him nothing, and which worried him at a moment when he needed all his coolness and self-possession for his interview with Mademoiselle Mezenc. He closed the pocket-book, dismissed his valet, and proceeded to change his clothes. He did not forget to take with him the photograph which Maurice had carried over his heart.

He now had to arm himself with courage, and he went off with the determination to put an end to this state of affairs, which weighed upon him. His carriage was waiting, and he gave the coachman the address, telling him to drive quickly.

Madame Mezenc and her daughter occupied a modest suite of rooms on the third floor of a house in the upper part of the Rue Blanche. Courtenay had time to reflect, and as he did not wish to indulge in any further conjectures upon an exhausted subject, he naturally turned his thoughts to the two women he was going to see; to the two, for, free as she was by the force of circumstances, Mademoiselle Marianne was not in the habit of receiving visitors alone. Her mother, confined to her arm-chair by partial paralysis, was quite capable of conversing, and, although she allowed Marianne a deal of liberty, she held to the conventionalities. She had been a great society woman once upon a time, and she passed her days in her drawing room, dressed as if she expected ceremonious calls; and she only permitted those who presented themselves to see her daughter after they had first paid their respects to herself. According to circumstances Mademoiselle Mezenc came into the drawing-room or awaited her visitors in an apartment which was a sort of studio. She painted upon porcelain, carved wood, and could even turn as well as a professional turner.

Courtenay expected to be received by Madame Mezenc, and he was wondering how he could manage to ask permission to enter her daughter's studio, when, as he came in sight of the house, he perceived a woman leaning out of a window on the third floor.

"That certainly is the house where Madame Mezenc lives," he said to himself. "Yes, I recognise it by the balcony on the first floor. And the suite which she occupies is on the third. It cannot be she who is at the window; she does not leave her chair. Can it be her daughter? and, if so, has she taken up a position at the window to watch for me? The place would be well chosen, for it overlooks all the upper part of the Rue Blanche, and, as I live in the Rue de Milan, I should have to come that way. Yes, but how could she know of my visit? If she does, she must already be informed of the result of the encounter, and that supposition is absurd. Coulanges would never have sent her a telegram, for, in the first place, he would have no desire to do such a thing, and, secondly, he neither knows her nor her address. As for Monsieur de Pontaurmur, I do not

think that he has had the audacity to telegraph to the young lady: 'I have killed your lover.' Of the seconds, Captain Morgan is incapable of committing an infamy of that sort, and, base as Corléon may be, he doesn't do evil for the pleasure of doing it. No, I think it must be Maurice she is watching for; she knew that he was going to fight to-day, for he told her so himself. Perhaps she even knew that the duel was to take place on the plain of Gennevilliers, and she thinks that Maurice will arrive by the Saint Lazare station; besides, he lives, or rather lived, in the Rue de Caumartin, and, if he had returned from the duel, he would have lost no time in going to see her. She is dying of anxiety, and perhaps she has been for hours at that window. I think it is the window of her studio."

As the carriage drew nearer, Courtenay looked up to make sure that he was not mistaken.

"It is indeed she," he murmured. "But she is looking down the street and does not see me. I am sorry for that, for if she saw me she would at once guess that an accident had happened to Maurice, and I should find her a little prepared to receive the terrible news I bring her. Poor little girl! What a blow it will give her! Unless—but no, Maurice's raving lacked common-sense, and she certainly loved him. I will commence with the mother, and if I can avoid a *tête-à-tête* with the daughter it will be all the better; and, after all, why not? It is at least fitting that the interview should take place in Madame Mezenc's presence, and my mission will be none the less fulfilled. I promised Maurice that I would personally apprise Mademoiselle Mezenc of his death, but I did not promise that there should be no one else present, and it does not depend upon me to prevent her mother from being there."

The carriage now stopped and George alighted, but before entering the house he looked up. "She is no longer there," he said to himself. "Did she see me? I shall know that immediately, for if she did she will not wait for me to ask to see her. I should not be very much astonished if she came in person to open the door."

But George was mistaken. A maid appeared in answer to his ring, and did not appear at all surprised to see him, although he called but seldom upon Madame Mezenc. "My mistress is in the drawing-room," said the girl; "and I will announce you, sir."

This was quickly done, for there were only the ante-chamber and the drawing-room to cross. Courtenay knew the suite, which was not large, and he remembered that the apartment where the young lady worked was separated from the drawing-room by two bed-chambers. "It seems that she did not see me," he thought. "So much the worse; the blow will be all the more severe."

Madame Mezenc was seated near the fireplace in her invalid's chair, a chair made expressly for her from plans designed by her daughter, who had a talent for mechanics, and presented by Maurice Saulieu. This ingenious chair moved upon rollers, and, by using her hands, the paralytic could transport herself from one place to



another. She also read easily from a movable desk, fixed to one of the arms, and spent three-quarters of her time in this seat. She embroidered there, ate there, and slept there until the time came for her nurse to put her to bed.

Madame Mezenc was scarcely fifty, and it was now ten years since she had been reduced to this sad state, but she bore her infirmities with extraordinary courage. It is true that she suffered only at intervals, but even her hours of pain did not make her ill-tempered or injure the clearness of her mind. She never complained, although she felt her misfortune very keenly. She never gave way to that discouragement which generally takes possession of the stoutest hearts when the invalid has no other prospect than death after long suffering. She liked to talk and she talked well, without pretence or ill-nature. She was kind-hearted without affectation, gentle without weakness, and, in fact, her only fault was loving her daughter too well, loving her passionately, almost violently. She lived only for her and in her.

She had once been possessed of rare beauty, of which she still preserved traces. She had beautiful teeth, her forehead was unwrinkled, and her eyes had lost nothing of their brightness. Her hair, white as snow, was marvellously becoming, and did not age her.

Courtenay had never before been so struck with her sweet face. It must be said that he did not see her often. He had called on her once or twice since Maurice's marriage had been settled, but he had never been alone with her, as his friend had always accompanied him. To-day his face naturally wore a grave expression, and he was not a little surprised at the reception accorded him by Marianne's mother. "How kind you are, my dear sir," she said, smiling brightly, "and how glad I am that you have had the courage to climb my three flights of stairs."

"She knows nothing," thought George. "It appears that her daughter does not confide in her."

"Sit down near me, and let us talk," continued Madame Mezenc, gaily. "I have a multitude of questions to ask you."

"And I, madame, came to——"

"In the first place, what have you done with Monsieur Saulieu?"

George, who had seated himself, almost started up again; but Madame Mezenc, talking no notice of his surprise, went on in her pleasant, well-modulated voice: "You monopolise him, and that is very bad of you. I acknowledge that you have almost a right to be angry with us, for we also take him away from you. Lovers neglect their friends. But you take too great a vengeance; we have not seen him for two days."

"Here I am in a nice position," thought Courtenay. "I cannot tell her point-blank, 'You will never see him again. He is dead!'"

"Oh! I am not uneasy," resumed the old lady. "We know that he consulted you before doing me the honour to ask my daughter's hand, and that you spoke in her favour. I am profoundly grateful

to you, for you scarcely knew her, and you could not judge of her merits. I assure you that she has not forgotten all the good you said of her. If Monsieur Maurice knew in what terms she speaks of you to me, I almost think he would be jealous."

"I am very much touched, madame, but I must tell you——"

"You can tell me anything you like presently; but I particularly want to assure you that my daughter and I both intend that your friend's marriage shall not prevent you from seeing your friend as frequently as formerly. You will not draw away from him, I hope; and, besides, it is not written that you will not marry yourself. I even think that a little bird has whispered something in my ear in regard to that very matter."

Courtenay made a gesture of denial.

"If I did not fear to be indiscreet," resumed Madame Mezenc, "I would suggest to you an idea which has come to me; but it would be, perhaps, a little early——"

"I assure you, madame, that I have no desire to throw celibacy to the winds," replied George.

"And I have no design of converting you to matrimonial ideas. Let us talk of something else. Do you see Madame Bréhal often?" asked the old lady, with a smile.

"Not oftener than usual," replied George, with a certain amount of impatience.

"Well, she is one of the most charming women I know, and I am absolutely astonished that she remains a widow. She is twenty-five, exceedingly pretty, with a deal of wit, and what is better, a good heart, and also a magnificent fortune. I should like her to have a husband worthy of her, and if I knew one—— But you are perhaps going to ask me why I am so much interested in Madame Bréhal's happiness? You don't know how very kind she has been to my daughter——"

"Excuse me, madame, I do know it. And, since you have spoken of Mademoiselle Mezenc, I——"

"You are surprised not to find her here. If you wish to see her, dear sir, you must go and look for her in her studio. She is seized with such a passion for painting that if I sent the maid to ask her to come here, I doubt if she would do so. Yes," continued Madame Mezenc, "it is a veritable rage with her, and has been so, especially, during the last few days. She works as if she had to earn her living, and that, too, at the time when she sees an unexpected future opening before her. Formerly, I encouraged her to cultivate the taste she has for art. I have such small means, you know, and when I am no more her situation would have been so precarious that I wished her to be in a position to do something for herself. Now, however, I can die in peace; she will have Maurice to care for her."

Courtenay, at these words, could scarcely repress a nervous gesture. Madame Mezenc's discourse about her daughter's happi-

ness troubled him so much that he could no longer endure it. It rested with him to stop it by telling her the terrible news, but he did not dare to do so, and, in fact, no one would have dared. He no longer even desired Marianne's arrival, for the presence of the poor girl would only have added to the difficulties of the situation. He merely thought of finding some pretext to go and see her in the studio, where, in horrible torture, she was doubtless waiting to know her fate ; and this pretext Madame Mezenc now furnished him with. He hastened to take advantage of it. "Indeed, madame," said he, with the most nonchalant air he could assume, "you will doubtless consider me indiscreet, but if you think that Mademoiselle Mezenc is not inclined to abandon her work, even for an instant, I will ask your permission to go to her studio."

"Oh ! I grant it with all my heart," responded Madame Mezenc. "Are you not Maurice's friend ? And, between ourselves, I fancy that Marianne will like to talk to you alone. She has secrets from me now ; you will not believe it, but I have noticed it, and I warn you that she will overwhelm you with questions : 'What is Maurice doing ? Why hasn't he been here yesterday and to-day ? Does he think of me ? What does he say of me ?' and a hundred others, which you will have to answer or quarrel with her. These young people are pitiless."

Courtenay listened, without a word, to this maternal outburst. He was already up, and longed to be able to proceed to the studio without appearing impolite.

"However," continued Madame Mezenc, "Monsieur Saulieu has probably sent a message by you to my daughter. A message ! what a grave word ! But I use it designedly, because I know that lovers attach importance to the most ordinary things. Monsieur Saulieu has, perhaps, sent you as an ambassador to implore Marianne's indulgence. There is a long absence to be pardoned, and he does not dare to come himself. I have guessed it, have I not ?"

Courtenay lacked the courage to answer "Yes." He simply bowed, and the vague sign was taken by Madame Mezenc as a token of acquiescence. "Go, sir," she said, "and do not abridge your story on my account. I am accustomed to solitude, and I foresee that Marianne will keep you as long as she can ; so prepare to acquit yourself as well as possible of one of those tasks which friendship imposes. I warn you, also, that she generally works while she talks, and I hope that you will not be offended at seeing her continue to paint some fan or turn a napkin ring while you are giving her news of Monsieur Saulieu."

Courtenay allowed Madame Mezenc to retain her illusions, and hastened to close the interview by bowing again, but this time very decidedly. There are bows which signify : "Not a word more, I am going ;" and the lady could not mistake it.

He did not even soften the distinctness of his pantomime by say-

ing a word or two, expressive of a desire to resume his conversation with the mother after seeing the daughter.

The truth was that he intended to leave the house without entering the drawing-room again. He knew that this was practicable by passing along a passage which led straight from the ante-chamber to the studio, and he did not wish to see Madame Mezenc again that day. One explanation was enough ; he did not care to have two. And he less feared telling his bad tidings to Maurice's betrothed than to this poor woman who suspected nothing, and whom the sad news might kill. Marianne Mezenc knew that her lover was to fight, and that duels sometimes end tragically. She was, therefore, better prepared to receive the blow.

The most difficult point for the envoy on these sad occasions is the broaching of the subject. To tell a woman who receives you with a smile upon her lips : "I come as a messenger of death," is horrible. When, on the contrary, her eyes question you anxiously, a look is a sufficient answer. There are gestures and looks which announce a death as clearly as a black-bordered letter.

Courtenay felt very much agitated when he reached the door of the studio. He was not obliged to knock, for the door was open, and he saw the young girl seated near the window, in an attitude which admirably displayed her beauty, although she had, no doubt, not taken up her position with that intention.

She was sitting with her head thrown back against the chair, her eyes half closed, and her hands folded in her lap. She was pale, and the pure outline of her profile showed distinctly against the dark curtain. She looked like one of those statues guarding tombs in the cemeteries of Italy, a rejuvenated Mater Dolorosa, or a Magdalen in the desert. Had she fallen asleep, after long hours of waiting ? Was she dreaming of her lover ? Did she see him struck to the ground by his adversary's bullet ? Courtenay was tempted to believe it, for her features expressed suffering, and her breast heaved as if oppressed by some terrible dream. He did not dare to advance, and indeed he was very near beating a retreat. He made a slight movement, however, and she rose immediately.

"You ?" she exclaimed, coming towards him. "It is you, and you are alone ! Ah ! my presentiments did not deceive me. He is dead."

"Yes," murmured George, profoundly moved : "he is dead. He died as brave men die, upon the field of battle."

"I knew it."

"You saw me in the street, and you guessed——"

"No ; it was he whom I saw. I saw him two days ago in a state of excitement bordering upon madness. I saw him, I tell you, and a few hours ago I felt a terrible pain ; it seemed to me that my heart was breaking."

"His last thought was for you. He died pronouncing your

name ; and before expiring in my arms, he bade me promise to come in person to tell you."

"I myself asked him to allow no one but you to come."

Courtenay did not attempt to repress a start of surprise, and she continued, bitterly : "You think ill of me ; acknowledge it, sir. You accuse me of indifference because I do not sob, because my eyes are dry, because I speak to you as if he had not been my betrothed. You do not know, you cannot know what I suffer, for you do not know me. I am twenty ; I ought to feel as girls of twenty do, but Heaven has made me otherwise ! I have no tears."

"Great sorrows are silent," faltered Courtenay, more and more astonished.

"Do you think that I would not weep if I could ? If I told you that I am the cause of his death, would you doubt me still ? Would you still accuse me of being insensible, when my heart is riven in two ?"

"It was true, then ! Maurice fought to avenge you !"

"He told you that ! I knew he would tell you. Did he tell you also that I did my best to prevent this duel ? that I begged of him to take no notice of the infamous words, and that he refused to listen to me ? Did he tell you that those words were of such a nature that they could not hurt me, and that the man who spoke them was merely deserving of contempt ?"

"I blamed Maurice for having struck Monsieur de Pontaumur in the face, but there are offences which a man of honour cannot tolerate ; and if any one publicly attacked the reputation of a young girl I was about to marry, I should act as my friend did."

"Even if the attacks were wildly extravagant ?"

"I do not know what Monsieur de Pontaumur said, but——"

"He said that Monsieur Saulieu had played a farce in asking for my hand ; that the marriage would never take place."

"That was simply absurd, and no one could have believed him. If he only said that——"

"He also said that Monsieur Saulieu would not marry me, because a man does not marry a woman when she has been his—mistress."

"Ah ! that was infamous, and I——"

"Infamous, yes ; but more absurd than infamous, unless you think as he did."

"Oh, mademoiselle !" said Courtenay, sadly, "how can you say that ? I know you and I knew Maurice. One must be a Monsieur de Pontaumur to believe in such infamies."

"You forget that I am poor," continued the young girl, bitterly, "and that Monsieur Saulieu was rich."

"I—no ; I do not understand."

"What ! you do not understand that it was supposed that I was only too glad to have the chance of marrying him ?"

"Well ? Whoever thought that was mistaken, for you were worthy of him. Your merit compensated for the inequality of

your fortunes. But there is a great distance from this mistake to an abominable accusation."

"Not so great as you think. It was thought that I was ambitious, that I wished this marriage to take place at any cost, and that I speculated on Monsieur Saulieu's generous instincts to accord me fitting reparation."

"But I say again that this is senseless——"

"What does that matter? Calumny has wings, and it ended by reaching my ears. I disdained to defend myself. I knew the author of it, and why he hated me."

"Monsieur de Pontaurmur? What reason had he for hating you?"

"He had persecuted me with his attentions, and I had let him see the antipathy I felt for him; and so he revenged himself."

"But he did not come here. Your mother does not receive, or at least she only receives intimate friends."

"She made a mistake in thinking that Monsieur de Pontaurmur desired to marry me, and at one time she tolerated his visits. My mother has a fixed idea to marry me advantageously. However, she closed her doors to this man when I acquainted her with his real character. Unfortunately I have not ceased to meet him in society, into which my aunt, Madame Fresnay, takes me. It was at a ball that Monsieur Saulieu overheard a conversation in which I was named."

"Who dared to say anything before him?"

"Some friends of Monsieur de Pontaurmur. It was a fatality. They were talking in a door-way between two rooms, and they did not see Monsieur Saulieu, who was hidden by a curtain."

"He should have demanded satisfaction from them."

"They said they had heard the slander they were repeating from their friend, and this statement of theirs was true. My aunt knew that the rumour had been circulated by Monsieur de Pontaurmur, and she had the imprudence to tell it to Monsieur Saulieu, and to me."

Courtenay made a gesture, which expressed what he thought of Madame Fresnay's conduct.

"I understood that Monsieur Saulieu would not tolerate this insult, and I proffered an explanation, which he had the delicacy not to ask for," resumed Marianne Mezenc. "I told him why that scoundrel wished to ruin my reputation, and begged of him not to pay any attention to the matter. I represented the consequences which an outbreak would have for me. He answered that he had found a means of avoiding that, but that he was determined to fight—and—you know the rest. I did all I could to prevent the duel, but——"

"Go on, mademoiselle."

"But Monsieur Saulieu, prior to that interview, which was the last, had taken a desperate resolve. He wished to die."

"He! But he was happy; he loved, was loved in return; you had consented to marry him."

"And I should have kept my promise; but he demanded what I could not give him."

"What! you loved him?" hurriedly exclaimed Courtenay.

"Not as he loved me. I felt friendship, esteem, and gratitude for him, but I did not share that passionate love with which I had inspired him, and I could not feign a sentiment I did not feel. Now I bitterly reproach myself for not having hidden the truth from him better. But my courage failed me; I could not lie——"

"And yet, when he asked you for your hand——"

"I said 'Yes,' and I should have been a devoted wife to him; I should have done everything in my power to render him happy."

"How did he discover his mistake? Did you enlighten him?"

"No, I assure you I did not. I had a presentiment that a sincere avowal would kill him, and I remained silent, although he begged me to speak. Then he laid traps to surprise a secret which I concealed in my inmost heart. I avoided them, however, for I had sworn to myself not to disturb his happiness; and then I, too, indulged in illusions—I nursed the hope that the clouds which threatened my life would pass away, that once married I should forget what I felt, what I still feel. I had more than a month to struggle on, to struggle against myself. I did not foresee the misfortune awaiting me. A day came—a fatal day—when Maurice guessed it all. It was on that day he resolved to die, and now he is dead; he died cursing me perhaps, me who would have given my heart's blood to have saved him."

"That day was the 27th of March," said Courtenay, slowly.

"The 27th of March!" repeated the young girl, turning pale. "What do you mean?"

"You have forgotten the date. Maurice remembered it."

"What! he spoke of it! What did he tell you? Hide nothing from me, I can bear all. I have suffered so much that one wound the more cannot hurt me."

"Maurice did not speak. He wrote."

"To you?"

"Yes, to me, a letter, all of which I could not read."

"Why?"

"Because this letter was in his breast pocket in a pocket-book, in which he had placed other papers, and——"

"And it was in this letter that he told you?"

"No. He only spoke in that of a will which he had made, and which he begged me to take to his notary. However, I found a few words in his handwriting, written in pencil upon the leaf of a memorandum book; I did not understand the meaning of these words, but I do now; and when you have seen them you will realise that he must have written them on the day he perceived that you did not love him."

George was about to produce the pocket-book, but Mademoiselle Mezen stopped him. "I do not wish to see anything," she said.

"But in this pocket-book there is also—your portrait, the one you gave him just before Christmas, and below this portrait you have written your name."

"I do not take back what I have given," was the rejoinder.

"Excuse me, mademoiselle," replied Courtenay, drily, "it was not to me that you gave that portrait, and I cannot keep it."

"Well, burn it, then."

Courtenay started. Mademoiselle Mezenc's words and manner seemed to him so strange that he wondered if sorrow had not affected her brain. She guessed what he was thinking, and said in a different tone: "You, also, accuse me of having no heart, I see. Everybody will think so when they know that the blow which has fallen upon me has made no change in my life. However, the opinion of others is indifferent to me, and I forgive you for thinking badly of me. You do not know me, you will never know me; no one knows me, not even my mother."

"I am sorry to have wounded you, mademoiselle, but I had a duty to fulfil, and——"

"I thank you for having come, and I beg of you to hear me to the end. I want you to know what I am going to do, and why I do it. If I could shut myself up in a convent I would enter one to-morrow; but my mother needs me, and, in her state of health, any violent emotion would kill her."

"It was for that reason I lacked courage to tell her the truth."

"You have seen her, then?"

"Certainly. I thought that you knew it."

"And you said nothing to her! Thanks! oh, thanks! I expected no less of you."

"But Madame Mezenc cannot always be ignorant of the truth."

"She will know that Monsieur Saulieu is dead, later on, when I have prepared her for the blow; but she shall never know that he was killed in a duel; she must never know it, and I will see that others do not tell her."

George was silent, but his expression of face showed his doubts.

"You doubt that being possible?" retorted Mademoiselle Mezenc. "Trust me. My mother will believe what I wish her to believe, and I shall begin by telling her that the marriage she had dreamed of for me will not take place. I have already let her suspect that I had consented to it against the dictates of my heart. I shall tell her that I have withdrawn my consent, that I have signified my resolution to Monsieur Saulieu, and that I shall never marry. I will even confess, if necessary, that I have learned, to my sorrow, what it costs a poor girl to become engaged to a rich man, and I shall declare that I will receive no one again on the same footing as I received Monsieur Saulieu; no one, not even you, for what was said of him might be said of you."

"Do you think that I would allow any one to slander you?" cried George.

"No," said the girl, her eyes burning with a singular flame, "I think that you would do what your friend has done, and I do not wish you to fall by the sword of a scoundrel. I shall never forgive



myself for having been the involuntary cause of this fatal duel, and if the same misfortune should happen to you, ah ! then, I should die !” George started in amazement, and Mademoiselle Mezenc turned her head away. One would have said that she feared to let him see the feelings reflected on her face.

“The sword !” repeated George, sadly. “Didn’t you know that Maurice had to submit to the conditions of that man who dared to maintain that he was the insulted party ? Did not Maurice tell you that he was going to fight with pistols ?”

“No,” murmured Marianne. “He only told me that he was to fight to-day, and I had not the courage to question him further.”

“I wished him to fight with swords ; and, had I known what had taken place before the scene of violence which made Maurice the offender, I should have prevented the meeting, for I should have fought in his place, and I should not, like him, have placed myself in the wrong. But what difference can my intentions make ? Maurice is now dead, and you think of taking a desperate resolution.”

“Do not pity me. I bring misfortune upon all those who approach me. It is only just that I should condemn myself to isolation. My future life is already traced out ; I shall take refuge in work, which will not give me peace of mind, but which will, at least, ensure me independence. I am clever enough to earn sufficient money for my mother’s support and my own.”

“If I told you that perhaps Maurice has provided——”

“I do not understand,” interrupted Mademoiselle Mezenc.

“In the letter he wrote to acquaint me with his last wishes he spoke of his will.”

“I hope that he has not insulted me by leaving me his fortune ?”

“Insulted ! Oh, mademoiselle !”

“Yes, insulted ; for people would say worse things than ever.”

“You were his betrothed, you would have been his wife, and he had the right to leave you his property.”

“Perhaps so, but I also have the right not to accept it.”

“Then you would refuse to benefit by his will ?”

“So I was not mistaken. That will——”

“I do not know what it contains. I have not seen it.”

“I thought you told me that he had confided it to you ?”

“No, you are mistaken, unfortunately ; for it may be lost.”

“What do you mean ?”

“Excuse me for returning to a sad subject and entering into painful details ; the letter in which Maurice spoke of the will was in the pocket-book, the one I have here ; he carried it in his pocket when he went on the field, and Monsieur de Pontaumur’s bullet——

“Well ?” asked Mademoiselle Mezenc, trembling.

“The bullet pierced the paper, as it pierced your portrait,”

“Oh ! how horrible !”

"And it carried away the passage in which Maurice told me what I had to do to find his will. Do you wish to see the letter?"

"No! Oh, no!" cried the young girl, stretching out her hands as if to repulse the relic which Courtenay offered to show her.

"I can understand that it is repugnant to you to touch it, but I may at least tell you what I read, which was: 'I ask you to give my notary my will, which is in proper form. You will find it in the ——' The rest of the sentence is missing."

"The ball could not have destroyed it, and if it is looked for——"

Mademoiselle Mezenc stopped short in the middle of her thoughtless response. The words which she had spoken evoked a frightful picture. This bullet was in Maurice's breast, and the idea of probing his wound with a scalpel made her shudder. George divined why she did not finish, and hastened to add: "Maurice evidently meant some piece of furniture with which I was familiar. He no doubt spoke to me of this very thing before the duel, but in the hurry attending the preparations for the encounter I have forgotten what he said. However, I shall do my best to recall it."

"What is the use?" murmured Marianne. "It is much better that the will should never be found. Monsieur Saulieu's relatives will inherit, and I shall not suffer from the affront which I fear. Besides, whatever happens, I am determined to receive nothing from him. If he had made me his heir, you would bring me the will and I should burn it. I have already declared to you that I do not wish to owe anything to any one except myself. My measures are taken, and, from to-morrow, I shall receive orders which will occupy all my time. Don't be astonished if you seldom see me."

"No one will be astonished that, after an event which makes you a widow——"

"I am not a widow, as I have never been married, and I shall ask Madame Fresnay to contradict any report that I was to have been married. She will perhaps require me to appear at her house on her reception-days as formerly. If I ceased to go there, people would believe that she did not speak the truth; so I shall perhaps have the courage to show myself at her Fridays. Oh! do not hasten to condemn me," added Marianne, noticing a movement of Courtenay's, almost immediately repressed. "I do not wish any one to guess my secret. I shall go to her house with death in my heart, but I shall go. I must."

"I do not blame you, mademoiselle," said Courtenay, with marked coldness; "only I cannot help thinking that in Madame Fresnay's drawing-room you will expose yourself to meeting the man who killed poor Maurice."

"You are mistaken," replied Marianne, drawing herself up. "I have insisted on my aunt forbidding him the house, and I will not submit to Monsieur de Pontaurmur's presence. Heaven grant that you also may not have to meet him again,"

"You probably mean that I shall be forced to see him at the club, of which we are both members. No, mademoiselle; I shall not see him there. If he does not realise that after this duel he ought to retire from the club where he was publicly struck, if he ever dares to set his foot inside it, I shall go there no more and send in my resignation."

"But Monsieur de Pontaurmur often goes to Madame Bréhal's."

"How do you know that?"

"He has boasted of it, at all events, and you are very intimate there. Can you induce her not to receive him?"

This was too much. George did not answer this embarrassing question, and he now only thought of retiring. "I will conform to your wishes, mademoiselle," he said. "I shall do everything which my friendship for Maurice demands, and I shall see that his intentions are carried out. But your name shall not be mentioned, and nothing will prevent you from acting as if you had never been Monsieur Saulieu's betrothed. Need I add that I will not trouble the repose you aspire to."

"Do you mean that I shall not see you again?" asked Marianne, with an emotion she did not try to conceal.

"I only beg of you to excuse me to your mother, if she is astonished to hear that I have left without saying good-bye to her." With these coldly polite words, George bowed and departed.

The door had remained open, and he knew how to reach the staircase without entering the drawing-room. He left hurriedly, still on his way he could hear the young girl sobbing.

He did not think, however, of going back to console her, but went off, outraged and still more afflicted.

"To kill oneself for a woman!" he muttered to himself. "There's the girl for whom Maurice sacrificed his life, and, on hearing of his death, she only thought of saving her compromised reputation. She did not show one spark of feeling. What can she hope to achieve with her ridiculous plans? Her mother will learn the truth sooner or later, and her aunt will never persuade any one that her marriage was not arranged."

George, thus talking to himself, descended the stairs two at a time. At the tenth step he was already saying: "I must, however, do her the justice to say that she was disinterested. Her pride revolted when I spoke of the will. And she is frank, for she did not hide that she never felt any love for Maurice. She did not play the comedy of regrets. It is not her fault, after all, if Maurice only inspired her with a feeling of friendship," he thought, on reaching the first floor. And, at the foot of the stairs he added: "Why did she speak to me of Madame Bréhal? Why did she recall the fact that Madame Bréhal has the weakness to receive Monsieur de Pontaurmur? One would say that she was jealous. If what Maurice told me were true! Supposing she does really love me!"

On his way home, George made laudable attempts to chase this idea away, but he only partially succeeded in his endeavours,

## III.

WHILE English people are beginning to live on flats, in huge mansions of more or less pretentious aspect, French persons of means are, on the contrary, taking to private houses. They do not care to live under the same roof as a dozen neighbours ; and the well-to-do man of the middle classes, who was contented thirty years ago with a fine apartment on the first floor in a central part of Paris, now thinks himself obliged to inhabit a house of the kind called "private," and situated at a long distance from the Boulevard des Italiens. He dies of boredom there, but he follows the fashion, and has a house to himself. Thus M. Bréhal, a millionaire banker, purchased a few years back a handsome place in the Avenue de Villiers, a commodious house with a large garden planted with beautiful trees, and facing a street recently laid out.

This financier, who had just married, gave the place to his bride as a wedding present, but he had no time to take up his quarters with her there. Six months after the ceremony, Madame Bréhal, who was only nineteen, became a widow and alone in the world, for she had lost both her parents when a child. Already rich in her own right, and brought up in the ideas of the middle classes, to which she belonged, she had found it quite natural, on leaving the convent, to marry a man who possessed a large fortune, and whom she scarcely knew. He did not displease her, moreover, and at his death she sincerely mourned for him ; however, she had never pretended to be inconsolable, and, her regulation mourning over, she did not disdain worldly pleasures.

The house, transformed under her direction, and furnished anew with intelligent taste, had opened its doors to Parisian society. Her family belonged to the commercial aristocracy, and among her school friends there were many who had made wealthy marriages, and who liked to receive as much as she did. Among her own acquaintances, and those of her husband, Madame Bréhal made a choice ; there were enough to form the nucleus of a pleasant circle, and as she pitilessly excluded the bores of both sexes, her house became one of those which witty people liked to frequent. A person was only received there on condition that he or she furnished a supply of gaiety and intelligence.

Madame Bréhal did not pose as a protectress of artistic and literary celebrities, however ; she avoided blue stockings, and men of talent were only admitted if they were also men of good-breeding. She did not have readings at her house, or launch forth un-

appreciated poets ; she wished her guests to be amused, and they were amused.

This independent attitude, of course, provoked severe criticism. Many women said that she lived too much outside of social rules, and found fault with her exclusiveness. Many men declared that a young widow, with two hundred thousand francs a year, had no right to remain a widow, and the most of them being, by the way, rejected suitors, did not hesitate to add : "There must be a lover concealed somewhere."

And then they searched, but all in vain.

Madame Bréhal did not conceal the fact that she had her favourite friends, but she lived in the full light of day ; her house was of glass. A woman cannot have secrets when she is served by a numerous retinue, and Madame Bréhal kept a dozen servants.

On the other hand, she did not hesitate to stop her carriage outside Courtenay's place in the Rue de Milan whenever she chose. George was assuredly the dearest of her intimate friends, and, during the last year especially, she had received him on a footing which somewhat astonished her acquaintances.

He openly professed his admiration for the young widow, praised her virtues, and excused her faults ; he was always ready to break a lance for her, like a veritable Don Quixote, and he even declared that if ever he grew tired of a bachelor's life he should become a suitor for the hand of this queen of widows. However, he never failed to add gaily that she wouldn't have him. Madame Bréhal, on her side, said to any one who cared to hear it, that of all the men she knew George Courtenay was the only one for whom a woman like herself could sacrifice her liberty, but that pleasant companionship was worth more than love, and that the sacrifice, moreover, would be reciprocal, for M. Courtenay had no desire to wear the chains of matrimony. To those more or less well-intentioned wiseacres who pointed out to her the danger of provoking slander, she replied that she despised gossips.

When George and Madame Bréhal spoke in this way they both meant what they said.

For some months, however, the character of their intercourse had somewhat changed. Madame Bréhal seemed desirous of entering more into George's life. She questioned him laughingly in regard to his plans for the future, spoke to him of his friends, wished to know what he thought of them—M. Saulieu among others—was interested in whatever he did, in the horses he bought, the card-parties where he lost his money, and the talk of the club. She even ventured now and then to give him a word of advice. And more than once George had wondered if he were not in love with Madame Bréhal without being aware of it. He perceived that he liked to be with her, and that the pleasures with which he had hitherto been contented palled upon him. As far as marrying her went, he scarcely thought of it, or, at all events, thought of it only

as a sub-lieutenant thinks of the life he will lead when he is a retired general. But when twenty-four hours went by without his seeing her, he felt that something was lacking in his life. So he was only too glad to keep the appointment which she had taken the pains of coming to the Rue de Milan to make, while Maurice was dying in the abandoned earthworks of Gennevilliers.

After his visit to the Mezencs, George returned home, very much disturbed, wishing to be alone, determined to close his door to every one, but also determined to accept the invitation of Madame Bréhal, his best and only counsellor. A telegram came at about seven o'clock from the doctor, saying that, if no unforeseen incident occurred, he should return to Paris that evening, and asking Courtenay to wait for him in the Rue de Milan.

George naturally dined at home. He was in no humour to dine at the club with numerous companions. But at nine o'clock, Coulanges not having appeared, he ordered his brougham, and half-an-hour later stopped before the monumental gateway of Madame Bréhal's residence. He was expected, for the gateway was open, and the arrival of the brougham was immediately signalled by the ringing of a bell and the appearance of two footmen in livery.

He was well acquainted with the house, the interior arrangements and decorations of which the charming widow had superintended in person, and yet, every time he came there, he marvelled as if he had never seen the place before. Even in the vestibule it was easily realised that one was in the house of a woman who cared nothing for expense; for the princely furniture here must have cost an immense sum; and also in the house of a woman of taste, for although everything was luxurious, nothing shocked the eye, and there was a touch of originality about the slightest details of the adornments. The vestibule was paved with white marble, and across it a broad band of Persian carpet was stretched. This also covered the staircase, lighted by large onyx candelabra and panelled with immense mirrors, which reflected the light and doubled its effect.

"Does Madame Bréhal receive this evening?" asked Courtenay, a little surprised by the illumination.

"Madame is at home, sir," replied the footman evasively, and George followed him without further questions. He remembered that one of Madame Bréhal's numerous fancies was to have all the candelabra and chandeliers lighted, even when she expected no one. She said that a lady had no right to reserve brilliancy for great receptions, after the fashion of those provincials who only dress in their best clothes in fête days, and only take the covers off the drawing-room furniture when they have company to dinner.

As George climbed the magnificent staircase, he thought of the little lodging in the Rue Blanche, where he had left Mademoiselle Mezenc alone with her sorrow. He now better understood the words she had spoken, words which had seemed to him so strange.

"What a punishment," he said to himself, "to be young, beautiful, and proud, when one is poor. And what courage she must have to support the life which Maurice's death has allotted to her. There is no great merit in Madame Bréhal's resignation to her widowhood, but Marianne, reduced to work with her own hands, condemned, too, to go about under penalty of losing all social position—it is atrocious! All pretty women ought to have four millions of francs and a palace like this."

It was indeed a palace that Madame Bréhal inhabited, and an artistic palace, which would have put many royal residences to shame, for royal residences are often mere official inns built for the use of some king or emperor. The dining-room, which Courtenay crossed, did not resemble one of those galleries where banquets are given to great dignitaries of State. It had only one window, but an immense deep window, all shrouded with plants like a conservatory. The ceiling was panelled with carved oak; the walls were hung with Cordova leather, stamped with arabesques. The side-board, in the style of the Renaissance, was flanked by figures of sirens, bearing garlands of flowers. And the old oak chairs had high and exquisitely carved backs, surmounted by female heads, after the Henry II. style.

Courtenay, who had once dined at Madame Mezenc's with Maurice, thought of the plain buffet, the mahogany table, and the cane-bottomed chairs. And when he entered the dining-room, where burnished panels alternated with hangings of white velvet; where statues placed upon ebony pedestals elbowed lovely paintings on gilded easels; where several superb arm-chairs of the "duchess" style, majestically surrounded the fire-place, he recalled the engravings in cheap frames, the hired cottage piano, and the waxed floor over which the paralytic rolled her chair about.

Madame Bréhal had installed herself that evening in a little drawing-room which led out of the large one. This apartment was a charming little place, which she liked above all others, and where she only received her intimate friends. It was circular, the hangings of the four windows were of China silk, and the chimney-piece looked like a little pagoda.

The lady, seated upon a sofa covered with cushions of divers colours, was reading by the soft light of an old Sèvres lamp, and she did not lift her eyes when Courtenay, without being announced, raised the silken door-hanging. She had never appeared to him more charming, and yet she did not efface from his memory the image of Marianne, whom sorrow had rendered even more beautiful.

The contrast was striking. Marianne was pale and dark-haired, with large black eyes and arched eyebrows, the clear-cut profile of a Grecian statue, and the figure of one of Jean Goujon's nymphs. Gabrielle Bréhal was, on the contrary, short and dimpled; her hair was of a ruddy golden hue—not carroty, however, and her eyes were blue, a little elongated towards the temples. She had the delicate

nose and full lips of Madame Dubarry, and the rosy complexion, brilliant teeth, and sparkling smile of one of Watteau's shepherdesses. And upon this eighteenth-century style of face—that century when love was the one absorbing affair in life—there rested an expression of frank gaiety and good humour which won all hearts.

"I would bet that the book she is reading does not interest her much," thought George, without advancing. "What is she thinking of?"

The footman had discreetly retired, and in this perfumed nook the silence was so profound that George could hear the almost imperceptible sound of Madame Bréhal's breathing. He did not wish her to think that he had been spying upon her, and he decided to step forward. It was enough to have surprised Mademoiselle Mezenc some hours earlier.

The lady started on hearing the slight noise he made in advancing over the carpet, and when she perceived him she rose and came towards him.

"I was beginning to despair of seeing you," she said, holding out her hand. "Thanks for having come, and for remembering that you still have a friend left you."

"You know, then?"

"Yes, I know that your unhappy friend, Saulieu, is dead. I guessed that he was going to fight and that you were to be his second. It was not difficult to guess that. You had abandoned me for two whole days. I even feared for an instant that your part in the duel was that of principal, but I inquired and was assured that such was not the case. I hoped that this encounter would result like so many others in which no one is wounded, and yet I longed to learn the truth. It was for that reason I went to your house. Alas! I knew the fatal ending only too soon. On my way from the Bois, I stopped at my dressmaker's, and there I found Madame Fresnay, who told me that Monsieur Saulieu had been killed."

"Madame Fresnay? How did she know it?"

"I did not ask her. But isn't she a near relative of Mademoiselle Mezenc, whom Monsieur Saulieu was to have married?"

"Her aunt by marriage. And so, at the moment when her niece was receiving the terrible news of Maurice's death, she was occupied in ordering some new dresses?"

"I was a little astonished at meeting her, and much more on seeing that she did not appear in the least degree afflicted. Perhaps she did not approve of that marriage."

"It is more natural to think that she has no heart. You will acknowledge, at least, that it is infinitely more probable."

"Don't let us judge her over-hastily. Tell me about the young girl whom this catastrophe throws into mourning. But first," continued Madame Bréhal, who still held George's hand and was drawing him towards the sofa, from which she had risen to receive him, "come and sit down opposite me. We can talk better



face to face, and this evening I have many things to say to you which I have kept back for a very long time."

George did not need any urging to take the place which Madame Bréhal assigned him. Like her, he was of opinion that, to talk agreeably, it is necessary to be opposite your companion. When seated side by side you are obliged to turn your head at every sentence. You cannot pay court to a woman when you only see her profile. On such occasions the eyes say more than the lips. Gabrielle Bréhal certainly did not wish any one to address burning declarations to her, since she had no desire to be married again; and yet she had taken care that the little room in which she received her intimates should be amply provided with conveniences for conversation. Near the sofa on which she sat there was an assortment of arm-chairs, ottomans, and stools. But our allusion to love is uncalled for; for that evening George's heart was full of sadness, and the charming woman who had summoned him had broached a sorrowful subject at the very outset; to tell the truth, moreover, he was not disposed to speak of anything else.

"Yes," said Madame Bréhal, "I asked you to come, because I expected no one this evening, and I wished to have a long chat with you. I am interested in Mademoiselle Mezenc, and you are the only person who can inform me exactly as to her situation."

"Why," answered George, "you know her situation. Mademoiselle Mezenc has no fortune, or so little that it is almost the same as if she had none. She and her mother live upon five or six thousand francs a-year, and this petty income will be diminished by one-half on the death of the mother."

"I know that she is poor. And Monsieur Saulieu's death is a great misfortune for her, as, by marrying him, she would have risen to an unhopèd-for position. Your friend was rich, was he not?"

"Rich! no. However, he inherited from an uncle a few hundred thousand francs."

"That was a good deal for a girl who has nothing. Besides, she loved him for himself, as he deserved to be loved, for he was a charming fellow. I wish I had known him better, but he was very reserved, and you brought him here so seldom."

"He lived only for her, and it was for her sake that he died."

"What! for her sake? I thought that the duel was caused by a discussion over cards at the club, that club of which you are so fond."

"Maurice took advantage of a scarcely offensive word to strike a man who had previously spread scandalous reports about Mademoiselle Mezenc."

"Then he did right. A man cannot allow the woman he loves to be insulted. I was very badly informed, it seems. I only heard that Monsieur Saulieu had initiated a quarrel with some one, I didn't know whom; I don't know now."

"What! Didn't Madame Fresnay tell you?"

"She told me that Monsieur Saulieu had been killed, and nothing

more. You can understand that I asked her no questions. Besides, she went away almost immediately. And then I only thought of the unhappiness which had overtaken you ; you had lost your best friend, and I cared little about knowing the name of his adversary."

"It is well, however, that you should know it, for this adversary may one of these days have an affair with me ; and as he is received at your house, I want to warn you——"

"I hope that you are not going to risk your life to avenge Monsieur Saulieu," said Madame Bréhal quickly. "But who is it, pray?"

"A man whom I have always held in horror, and whom you receive. It was Monsieur de Pontaumur who killed Maurice."

"Monsieur de Pontaumur ! I confess that I thought him incapable, not of fighting, but of speaking about a young girl so——"

"Infamously, say the word. There is no other with which one can qualify his conduct. He said to several men, who have repeated it, that Mademoiselle Mezenc was Maurice's mistress."

"Oh ! if he said that——"

"Do you doubt it?"

"No, since you say so. But I am very much astonished. He has never spoken of her to me except in her praise."

"Do you undertake his defence?" asked George, with a certain tinge of bitterness in his tone.

"No, my friend," answered Madame Bréhal, sweetly. "I have no particular reasons for defending a man whom I meet everywhere, and who even comes here sometimes, as many others do, but whom I don't particularly fancy."

"Why do you receive him, then?"

"I might suggest to you that I am not obliged to render you an account of my conduct," said Madame Bréhal, half-smiling. "But I prefer to tell you quite simply that on Wednesdays my house is open to all those who care to present themselves, and I have never thought of excluding Monsieur de Pontaumur, who is a well-bred man."

"It is perhaps for that reason that you do not see me very often on that day."

"I have, in fact, noticed that you frequently abstain from attending my weekly receptions. They are not always amusing, however, and I am not angry with you. If you forsook me entirely, matters would be different. But you are not sulky with me, since you are here?"

"Sulky ! Oh, no. But I confess that if I were exposed to finding that man in your house——"

"Is that a threat?"

"Not even a condition. I have no right to impose any conditions upon you and still less would I presume to threaten you. Acknowledge, however, that, after what has occurred to-day, I might very well ask you to choose between Monsieur de Pontaumur and myself."

"I thought so. This is a regular ultimatum. I see you wish me

to close my doors to him. I should ask nothing better, but it would be a mistake."

"Why, pray?"

"Do you wish to know? Well, because Monsieur de Pontaumur has paid me attentions which I have pretended not to take in earnest, but which have not passed unnoticed. Some of my friends have spoken to me on the point. Now, if I banished him they would think that I was afraid of him, and that would lead to endless remarks. How could I do it, besides? To close one's doors to a gentleman one receives is easily said, but it is not so easily done when this gentleman has committed no act deserving of public reprobation. I cannot write to Monsieur de Pontaumur saying that I forbid him to set foot in my house without giving him any reason."

"You can, at least, if he asks to see you, send word that you are not at home."

"That is what I should do if he came, like you, on the days when I only admit my intimate friends. But on Wednesdays I don't belong to myself, so to speak. To keep Monsieur de Pontaumur out I should have to instruct my people, and all Paris would know it."

"And no one would be astonished that you no longer cared to see the murderer of Maurice Saulieu, my best friend."

Madame Bréhal was silent, and a pause followed upon this speech. The pretty widow looked at Courtenay as if to ask him if he intended to complete the thought which his last words indicated, but as he did not speak, she rejoined: "You are mistaken, my dear George. I was not very intimate with Monsieur Saulieu; I am so with you, it is true, but—you are neither my relative nor my husband. People would be astonished if I forbade Monsieur de Pontaumur my house for the sole reason that he is your enemy. I am certain, moreover, that he will have the good taste to keep away. He has a certain amount of tact, and he cannot be desirous of meeting you face to face."

"He will do so, however, if he does not retire from the club," replied Courtenay, with very marked ill-humour.

"He will doubtless retire. But don't let us speak any more of him, pray; let us rather return to that young girl. What is she going to do now?"

"She is going to work for a living. She paints and carves, and she will try to make some money out of her talents."

"Then she will renounce society?"

"No, she will go wherever she has been in the habit of going. She has even decided not to wear mourning for Saulieu, whom she was to have married in a month's time."

"That is a strange resolution."

"Strange, yes, to those who do not know Mademoiselle Mezenc."

"But you know her well, do you not?"

"I began to know her a few hours ago."

"You have seen her, then, since this unfortunate duel?"

"Yes ; Maurice made me promise, before he died, to go in person and inform her of his death. I have kept my word, and I almost regret having kept it. But why do you ask me what I think of his betrothed ?"

"Because I wish to be her friend, as you were the friend of Maurice Saulieu."

"You ; her friend !" exclaimed Courtenay.

"Why not ?" asked Madame Bréhal, gently. "Do you not think her worthy of my friendship ?"

"I do not say that."

"Or do you think that I don't deserve hers ?"

"I think that she would be only too fortunate in having a protectress like you, but——"

"But I am too old to be her friend ; I am twenty-six and she is twenty ; too old and too—what shall I say—frivolous ?"

"You take pleasure in deriding me."

"On the contrary, I am speaking very seriously," replied Madame Bréhal ; "and if you will listen to me a minute, you will be convinced of it. When I learned from Madame Fresnay that Monsieur Saulieu had fallen in that unfortunate duel, my first thought was for you. I knew how intimate you were, I pitied you with all my heart, and I longed to console you. Do not misunderstand what I say, but I am only a woman, and cannot replace the friend you have lost. I then thought of Maurice's betrothed, of that poor child who was left alone with an infirm mother, and no other relative save an aunt, whom, I confess, I should not trust to take charge of a young girl in society."

"Madame Fresnay ! an idiot, and perhaps worse than that. It was she who caused all the trouble by her chattering, and her behaviour is revolting. She should have been with her niece, instead of going to talk over the fashions with her dressmaker. You are a thousand times right. Mademoiselle Mezenc is in very bad hands."

"You are not astonished, then, that I wish to take her out of them ?"

"Your views are excellent, but I doubt if they can be realised."

"Why not ? No doubt, I only know Madame Mezenc very slightly, still I am ready to become more intimate with her. She is no longer young, and a cruel malady condemns her to remain at home ; it is therefore my place to make the necessary advances, and I shall make them all the more willingly, as Madame Mezenc is a distinguished woman in all respects."

"Her only fault, I think, is being weak."

"As regards her daughter ? That is a very excusable weakness. Now, I want you to tell me why you do not approve of my plan ; is it because you think that Mademoiselle Mezenc would disapprove of it, if you mentioned it to her ?"

"I cannot tell, not knowing quite what your plan is. But she is in so different a position to yours——"

"I know it, and I do not intend to prevent Mademoiselle Mezenc from working for her living, since she has resolved to do so ; I even admire her for having taken that resolution. But you have just told me that she did not wish to renounce society, and in that respect I again think that she is right. So why should she not come to my house, and why should I not go to hers ? Would you yourself, George, cease to come here, simply because you might meet Mademoiselle Mezenc ?"

"No, no ; and yet I must tell you something about her. When you know it, you can at least act with a knowledge of the case."

"Well ?"

"In the first place, she formally declared to me that she had never loved Maurice."

"And yet she would have married him !"

"Yes, certainly, in deference to her mother's wishes. That excuse seems to you a poor one, I presume. She gave me others, however, which you will perhaps consider better ones. She says that she had not the courage to take away Maurice's illusions, which he finally lost though, for he perceived that she only felt a warm friendship for him, and it was this sad discovery which impelled him to seek death. I think, for my part, that she was sincere in what she said, and I am quite sure that hypocrisy isn't one of her faults. She is incapable of disguising her sentiments, and she even carries frankness too far, in my opinion."

"Mine is that one can never be too frank. And if you have only that to reproach her with——"

"Excuse me, I do not reproach her at all. I simply tell you this, because I think it advisable that you should know it."

"Thank you. But you have your own opinion in regard to this girl ?"

"Oh, certainly ; in what concerns certain points of her character. For instance, I think that she has a will of iron ; a deal of pride ; too much, perhaps, for she has already suffered from it and will suffer again ; and also remarkable disinterestedness. I am almost sure that Maurice left her all his fortune, and she declares that she will not accept it."

"Well, these are qualities of the first water."

"Which may become faults if they are exaggerated. And then I do not know all ; I only spent half an hour with her, and that is not enough to study her character. The impression, however, that I carried away with me after this short interview is that Mademoiselle Mezenc is of an extravagant nature, in good as well as in evil. I will add that I have not detected the evil, but I repeat that I do not know her well."

"You are a man, and you understand nothing of the sentiments of a young girl. I shall know her very quickly."

"I hope so ; but how are you going to introduce her to your society, which is not hers ? On what pretext will you patronise her ?"

"That is very simple. In the first place, I shall ask her to paint four panels for a summer salon my architect is finishing; flowers are in her line, I believe."

"I think so. By the way, I am not sure whether she has any real talent; I am even inclined to believe the contrary."

"It will suffice if she consents. I only want a pretext to attract her here and present her to my friends."

"Even to Monsieur de Pontaumur?" asked Courtenay, ironically.

"Monsieur de Pontaumur is not my friend; you know it very well, and it is unkind of you to speak in that way. But I will forgive you, since you have, without meaning it, given me the pretext I wanted to get rid of that person whom you don't like, nor I either for that matter. No one will be astonished if I deprive myself of his visits, when I receive Mademoiselle Mezenc, who was to have been Monsieur Saulieu's wife."

"You would do that?"

"How can you doubt it? Do you think that I could request that young girl to put up with the presence of the man who killed her lover, and who, moreover, slandered her?"

"Then I hope that she will accept your offer. I even hope that you will succeed in marrying her advantageously."

"I hope so, too."

"It will be more difficult than you think, however."

"Because she has no dowry? Is that a reason why she shouldn't find a husband? There are still some men in Paris who do not care for money, or who have enough for two. You yourself, my dear George, would not hesitate to marry a woman as poor as Job, if you loved her."

"I, possibly. But I am an exception. And then the difficulty would come from Mademoiselle Mezenc. She is strangely sensitive on that point; she does not wish to be married out of charity."

"Then only rich people could marry. It is not possible that she spoke seriously, if she used that expression."

"She did not use it, but I am sure that it expresses very well what she thinks. She considers that poverty condemns her to remain unmarried, under penalty of exposing herself to new misfortunes. She was slandered simply because she was poor, and that caused Maurice's death."

"She is mistaken if she thinks that wealth preserves one from unhappiness," murmured Madame Bréhal. "People envy my lot, yet if they knew——"

"What?" said Courtenay, smiling. "If with your fortune you are unhappy you must have some love troubles, and up to the present——"

"I have not had any? Such is your opinion, and if I contradicted you, you would smile perhaps. I assure you, however, that if I had any love troubles I should not select you for a confidant. But ad-

mitting that I am free from such worries, do you count as nothing the unhappiness of doubting the sincerity of all the declarations made to me?" added Madame Bréhal, gaily.

"Why should you doubt them?" asked George, surprised by this sudden change in the conversation, which hitherto had been devoted exclusively to Mademoiselle Mezenc.

"Because I have a fine house and two hundred thousand francs a year, my friend. Whenever any one has told me he loved me, I have never been able to believe that it was for myself alone. This is a punishment which poor girls don't know. They are not loved for their goods and chattels."

"I have no doubt but what you *have* met men who only coveted your fortune. But is it to be concluded, on that account, that you never inspired a real attachment?"

"I fear so."

"Do you know that, if you really lack all faith on that point, it would discourage any good-hearted fellow who honestly fell in love with you? I know people who would never avow their passion, under such circumstances, for fear of being misunderstood."

"You do? Really?"

"I at least know one," responded George, drawing a little nearer.

"You, my friend? Yes, I think that if you loved me you would be silent through excess of delicacy. But you do not love me."

"How do you know?"

A moment more and George would have been kneeling at her feet, perhaps without really meaning to do so, but the sound of a footfall made him recover his equilibrium and prevented Madame Bréhal from answering him. The footman, who had ushered him in, had appeared on the threshold, and for this footman to have come without being summoned it was evident that some unlooked-for incident had brought him, for Madame Bréhal had expressly declared that she was at home to no one. George had immediately resumed the ordinary attitude of a visitor, and no doubt he was not sorry of an interruption which came just in time to prevent him from yielding to a ridiculous impulse.

Madame Bréhal, however, probably did not share George's ideas, for she cast a severe look at the servant who had ventured to interrupt the conversation at the most interesting moment.

"What is it?" she asked. "I gave you orders——"

"Excuse me, madame, but a gentleman is below——"

"Well, why did you not tell him that I was not receiving?"

"The gentleman desires to speak to Monsieur Courtenay."

"To me?" exclaimed George. "What does that mean?"

"He sent up his card," replied the footman, advancing with a silver salver in his hand.

George took the card, read the name which it bore, and made a gesture of surprise. "Ask the gentleman to wait," said he.

"No bad news, I hope?" asked Madame Bréhal, as soon as the servant had retired.

"No, no. This is one of my friends, whom I waited for at home till nine o'clock."

"And who guessed that you were here," added the lady with a smile. "That does honour to his perspicacity."

"He must have insisted on seeing me, and was no doubt then told that he would find me at your house. My valet knew that I was coming here, since you gave your message to him this afternoon."

"And, naturally, you did not order him to be silent, for you do not conceal your visits to me any more than I conceal the fact that I see you. You did not foresee that one of my people, in announcing the arrival of your friend, would interrupt the beginning of a sentence which presaged a declaration."

"Confess that it was well it happened as it did, and that you provoked the declaration a little. I was about to thrust my head into the noose for you to laugh at me."

"Laugh at you! I assure you that I should take no pleasure in doing that. We were speaking of serious things, and I don't know how we came to discourse about love, as we are not in love with one another. There are days, however, when these things are in the air, but we must never begin again."

"I shall not promise that."

"No, no. Never. We must not play with fire, and if yours should be rekindled I could not restrain you."

"Say, rather, that you would send me away."

"Not at all. I should much prefer to keep you, for we do not agree, and I should like to convert you to my ideas. But your friend is waiting, and if he has taken the trouble to make the journey to the Avenue de Villiers, he no doubt has some important news to tell you."

"My friend is Doctor Coulanges, who was Maurice's second with me, and whom I left at Saint-Ouen to answer all the inquiries made by the authorities. I think he ought not to have followed me here, unless he comes to tell me of some danger."

"What! you are exposed——"

"To being arrested. Yes, but the prospect does not alarm me much, as we have nothing to reproach ourselves with. If it really happens, I shall console myself by thinking that that scoundrel Pontaurmur will be the chief prisoner."

"Whatever occurs," said Madame Bréhal, quickly, "I promise you that you shall not meet him in my house. I will see Mademoiselle Mezenc to-morrow, and do my utmost to persuade her to work here. Her presence will protect me from the visits of a man who has become odious to me since he killed your friend. When shall I see you again?"

"When I have finished with the painful duties I must discharge.



Maurice Saulieu had no relatives in Paris, and I shall have to act for his family."

"How I pity you ! and how I wish I could share your sad task. But I am only a woman, and women are of no account in the great trials of life. Go, my dear George, and believe that I shall not cease to think of you for an instant during the sad time there is in store for you."

Courtenay thereupon kissed the hand which Madame Bréhal offered to him, and left her without further remark. He was not sorry to go. The air in that perfumed retreat intoxicated him. He had lost the free use of his faculties, and he wished to recover it. He went off disturbed and discontented with himself, almost as when he left Marianne Mezenc's studio,

"Is it fated then," he thought, as he crossed the large drawing-room, "that I shall forget Maurice's death to listen to peculiar lamentations and equivocal expressions of faith ? One woman informs me of desperate resolutions, and declares that she never loved her betrothed, and that her heart was given elsewhere. The other amuses herself by enlarging upon the inconvenience of wealth in connection with love, and nearly succeeds in bringing me to her feet. And again, with that girl, if I cut her confidences short, it was because I felt an emotion which was not caused by poor Maurice's death. Twice in the same day, this is too much ! I am ashamed of myself. Fortunately, the doctor is here. A talk with him will cure me. But what the deuce can he have to say to me to be in such a hurry ?"

The footman was waiting at the top of the marble staircase, and preceded M. Courtenay into the vestibule. Coulanges was not there, and George learnt that, after sending up his card, he had re-entered the cab in which he came. Courtenay's brougham was before the door, and when he went out he saw that, perhaps out of deference for such an aristocratic equipage, the driver of the cab had stationed himself some twenty paces off. He could not see Coulanges, and, thinking that he would find him inside the vehicle, he signed to his coachman to stay where he was, and lighting a cigar walked down the street. There was no one in the cab, however. He easily assured himself of this, as the door was open. "The gentleman got out," said the driver from the box.

"Ah ! and where has he gone ?" asked Courtenay, surprised.

"To walk along the fortifications. I saw him turn the corner over there. Oh ! he cannot be far off ; it isn't five minutes since he left the cab."

"What is the matter with him ?" growled George. "Is he going back to Saint-Ouen on foot ; I have a great mind to call him ; but no, in this quiet place my voice would attract all the servants in the house : they would think that I was calling for help. I will go and see what has become of him : that is the quickest and surest way."

The plot of ground purchased by the late M. Bréhal was of triangular form, and was bordered by the Avenue de Villiers, the Rue de Courcelles, and the Boulevard Berthier, which latter runs along by the fortifications. The house faced the avenue; the flower garden stretched along the boulevard, and the grounds which completed the property edged the Rue de Courcelles. From the entrance there extended on either side a high wall, above which one could see the trees of the grounds.

Courtenay had always come in a carriage when visiting Madame Bréhal, and had never been further down the avenue than the entrance of the house. On setting out to meet his friend Coulanges he was therefore venturing into unknown regions, but he presumed that the fanciful doctor had not gone far, and he did not think in the least of the unpleasant meetings to which a person is exposed when he walks at night-time in unfrequented parts of Paris. Besides, it was not very late, and some municipal revenue officers were within reach of his voice, without speaking of his own coachman and the driver of Coulanges' cab.

He advanced to the corner of the wall, gave a glance to the right, and saw no one. The Boulevard Berthier was apparently deserted; in fact, there seemed no doubt of it, for the gas-jets enabled one to see distinctly.

"Where can Coulanges be?" wondered George, who was beginning to feel uneasy. "I must find out and set my mind at rest." And he walked down the boulevard, keeping close to the wall.

On his left, rose up the embankments of the fortifications, and a little further on there was a mound, marking a bastion which had done duty during the German siege. When he reached this hillock, he paused to look about him, and it seemed to him that there was a man seated at the foot of the mound. There is nothing alarming in a man seated at the foot of one of the earthworks of the Paris fortifications between ten and eleven o'clock in the evening, nor even anything astonishing about it, for such places are frequented at night by people who belong to the lower classes, and notably by drunkards, who come there to sleep off the wine they have absorbed in neighbouring taverns.

But this man was not asleep. He was watching, and when he saw George appear he suddenly rose up. On seeing this motion, George backed against the wall of Madame Bréhal's grounds, prepared to defend himself against an attack. He was greatly surprised, however, to see that the man, instead of advancing, made him a sign to approach, and the idea came to him that this star-gazer might be the doctor he was looking for. It was Coulanges' figure and dress, so far as the light from a street lamp, some twenty feet off, allowed him to judge.

George, who never hesitated, deliberately crossed the road, and, as he reached the opposite sidewalk, he saw that the man in question was indeed Coulanges.

"What the devil are you doing there?" he called out to him ;  
"and why are you gesticulating like that?"

"Not so loud, not so loud !" responded the doctor. "Come at once ; I want to speak to you."

George, feeling more puzzled, quickened his pace, and in another moment joined Coulanges, who caught him by the arm and drew him into the shadow cast by the hillock.

"Well, will you explain yourself?" demanded George.

"It was to explain matters that I drew you here," whispered the doctor. "Here we cannot be seen, and we can talk without any one hearing us."

"But who would hear us ? There is no one here."

"Now, no ; and yet I don't know, a man with good ears might hear us all the same. Besides, this one may reappear at any moment."

"I understand less and less. Has all this worry deprived you of your senses?"

"Let me tell you what has happened ; my story will perhaps be interrupted, but——"

"Go on—make haste. You drive me crazy with your preambles. Who are you watching here ? Tell me at once."

"If I told you point blank you would not believe me, or at least you would think it improbable, and you would interrupt me to ask questions, and I should have to go back to the beginning ; so I prefer to begin at the beginning ; but, first of all, let me place myself so as not to lose sight of that enclosure on the other side of the boulevard."

"Good ! the mystery is behind that wall, it seems," muttered Courtenay.

"My dear fellow," said Coulanges, with his back against the embankment, "you must not think that I came here without a reason. I sent you a telegram to ask you——"

"To wait for you. I received it, but I was obliged to go out at nine o'clock. Madame Bréhal had taken the trouble to call at my house in the afternoon."

"Your valet told me so, and gave me the lady's address. By the way, she lives some distance out. But I was very anxious to see you this evening—I will tell you why presently—so I drove to the end of the Avenue de Villiers, and, at the risk of being indiscreet, I sent you my card."

"Well, as to all this, I knew it already, or else I had guessed it. But, go on, doctor, go on."

"Well, as you did not come, after waiting for a quarter of an hour on the sidewalk, as I felt tired with running about all the evening at Gennevilliers, from the gendarmes' barracks to the mayor's office, and so on—well, I got into the cab to rest my legs. The man who drives your brougham this evening saw me, and I fancied that he would tell you where I was."

"It was needless. I perceived your cab, and I thought that I should find you inside, but you were not there. Then I asked your driver, and he told me that you had gone in this direction."

"Not for my pleasure, I assure you. I had been seated for about five minutes upon the hard cushions of my cab, when suddenly a man passed by quite near me."

"And you followed this man, I suppose. But I don't understand what your motive was in tracking him. Did you know him?"

"I thought I recognised him."

"Well, you had only to call him, and you would have known at once."

"I took care not to do that, for reasons which you will understand when I have told you all. Let me finish. I should like, before giving you the key to this mystery, to ask you what you think of the duel, and what followed it?"

"Doctor, you are really insupportable. However, we have both of us some time to spare. My call is made, and you, I suppose, won't return to Gennevilliers this evening."

"Oh, no! I have had enough of that; and yet everything is not finished over there, but no matter. I told you that this person attracted my attention; I saw him stop at the corner of the avenue and look back, evidently to make sure that he was not being followed; and then he turned to the right. Then I wished to know where he was going."

"That idea would never have occurred to me."

"Perhaps not. But wait before giving an opinion. I alighted, and advanced to the corner of the wall; from there, without being seen, I could watch the movements of the gentleman."

"It was a gentleman, then?" asked Courtenay, ironically.

"Do you think that I should have amused myself with watching a tramp? I have nothing to do with such people."

"I am sure of it. Well, what did your gentleman do?"

"He walked on for about thirty yards, and then disappeared."

"In a trap, like an imp in a pantomime?"

"No, in the wall."

"You are certainly making fun of me!"

"Excuse me; I forgot to tell you that there is a door. Look, you can see it from here."

"I only see some palings, which join the garden wall."

"Look more carefully, and you will see that, just where the palings begin, there is a sort of recess. The entrance is there."

"The entrance to what?"

"I must ask you that; for I have never been here before, whereas you, being intimate with Madame Bréhal, must know something about the surroundings of her residence."

"I know that the garden is surrounded by walls, and beyond it there is some ground which she has never cared to sell, for fear somebody might build there."

"And that ground is simply enclosed by some palings, tolerably high and well put together. At all events, it is impossible to see what there is on the other side."

"There is nothing at all. The land is uncultivated."

"Good! But then the question is: Is there, behind those palings, any communication between this uncultivated plot of ground and the garden?"

"I vaguely remember that in strolling about the walks I once perceived an old door which must have been condemned a long time ago, for it is almost hidden by ivy. But what is the meaning of all these questions, please?"

"The other door, the one I have pointed out to you, only gives access into the field, or uncultivated ground, call it what you like. At the point where the palings begin there is a sort of gate, which opens by means of a key. I have been there, and felt the lock."

"And this man had a key?"

"Exactly. He took it out of his pocket, used it, entered, and locked the gate behind him."

"But this is a story of thieves you are telling me!"

"Excuse me; you just said there was nothing to steal there."

"That is true."

"Might it not be supposed that from the field the man entered the garden by that apparently condemned door?"

"The deuce! If I believed that, I should immediately go and warn Madame Bréhal's servants. A man who takes a roundabout way like that has no good intentions. After all, what are we doing here instead of giving the alarm?"

"I am waiting for this singular visitor to come out again."

"And when he comes out, what will you do? It is a hundred times better to capture him in the act of theft. We need not both of us remain here, at all events. Continue to mount guard here, and I will give the alarm to the people of the house. I will place myself at their head, and we will search for this rascal; if he comes out you can call, and besides, I will send you reinforcements."

"Come, my dear fellow, pray reflect before putting so many people on the track."

"I have reflected."

"Yet, if this man were not a thief? If he were——"

"What?"

"Good Heavens! I don't affirm anything; but it is not only thieves who clandestinely enter houses. There are also—lovers."

"Lovers!" repeated Courtenay, completely taken aback.

"Oh! it may be all right. A woman may receive a gentleman secretly, with the best intentions."

"Come, doctor, what you say lacks common-sense, and you know it very well. A man does not present himself at eleven o'clock in the evening with the key of a secret door in his pocket when everything is strictly proper."

"Unless he does so without being authorised," said Coulanges.

"To have a nearer look at the house where his idol reposes, or to play the guitar under her windows! That is improbable."

"You suppose, then, that Madame Bréhal——"

"I suppose that the individual who just went in is simply a thief; I have already told you that, and I return to my first idea. Wait here while I speak to the servants. It will only take five minutes, and I will return to help you if the knave, seeing that the alarm is given, tries to escape by that gate, which is more than probable."

"Wait a minute. You will regret your precipitation."

"Wait for what? Till this scoundrel has pillaged the house? Is that what you mean?"

"You forget that I thought I recognised the man."

"True. If you had not thought you recognised him you wouldn't have followed him. I no longer thought of that," replied Courtenay, shrugging his shoulders. "Well, tell me who it was."

"My dear fellow, it is so extraordinary——"

"Well, I expect extraordinary revelations. Out with it!"

"You will not believe me, and yet I am sure that I was not mistaken. It was Monsieur de Pontaumur."

"You are mad!"

"No, I saw him clearly. He passed quite close to my cab, and his figure struck me. And then, when he turned to see if any one was following him, the gaslight from the corner fell full on his face. I was so surprised to see poor Saulieu's adversary outside Madame Bréhal's house that I wished to know where he was going. I scarcely foresaw the end of the adventure, however, and I begin to believe that I did wrong to follow him."

"The end! the end!" repeated Courtenay, angrily, "I do not understand your end. Pontaumur, admitting even that it was Pontaumur, must have continued on his way, and it was not he who entered that enclosure. You told me that you lost sight of him for a few moments."

"Yes, but he wouldn't have had time to disappear right away down the boulevard. He was scarcely fifty steps ahead of me. And, besides, where could he have hidden? This boulevard is as straight as the grand avenue of the Tuileries, and on the other side of the fortifications there is a deep moat."

"And this hillock near which I found you?"

"I went round it before sitting down, and I can answer for it that there was no one behind it. Besides, as I came up I observed the man while he was opening the gate, and I am certain that it was the same who, a moment before, had walked up the Avenue de Villiers."

"And your conclusion is?"

"That the man is not a thief. Monsieur de Pontaumur is wealthy, or at least he is supposed to be; and even if he were not, he would not practise theft under such circumstances as these, by breaking, alone and at so early an hour, into an inhabited house."

"You think, then, that he is Madame Bréhal's lover?"

"My dear fellow, I think nothing at all. I do not know the lady. I have never heard anything evil of her, and I am unaware whether she knows Monsieur de Pontaumur or not. You do know her, however, and you are much better able to judge than I am. For my part, I declare that I do not believe it possible. Madame Bréhal is a widow and free. If she cared for any man she could receive him openly—marry him if she liked—so why should she resort to secrecy? Are you not of my opinion?"

"I agree with you so absolutely that I am going to the house to give the alarm. If it was Monsieur de Pontaumur who entered that enclosure, we shall see him. And I should not be sorry if it were he. It would be an excellent opportunity to punish him."

Courtenay now made a step forward, but the doctor detained him.

"Take care," he said, gently. "This man, if he is captured, will have to explain what he came there for. And who knows what he will invent to justify his conduct? He may slander Madame Bréhal." Courtenay started. He knew what M. de Pontaumur was capable of. "And even if he said nothing," continued the doctor, "the servants will never believe that a gentleman, dressed like he is, came there to steal."

"They can believe what they like; it is none of my business."

"It seems to me that Madame Bréhal will scarcely thank you for exposing her to remarks among her people. The more innocent she is the more anxious she will be to avoid scandal. And, moreover, permit me to say, that you have no right to interfere in so delicate a matter. You are no relation of hers."

"I am her friend, and nothing more, but that is quite enough."

"No, it is not enough, my dear Courtenay. I am very disinterested in this matter, since I have not even the honour of Madame Bréhal's acquaintance. I can therefore examine the affair with fitting composure, and——"

"Oh! confound your reasoning! A man has entered her house. I wish to know why. If this man is Monsieur de Pontaumur, there is all the more reason for clearing up the matter."

"By clearing it up, as you call it, you may do exactly what he desires. I have the worst opinion of him, and I should not be at all surprised if he wished to compromise Madame Bréhal. If you act as you say, you will, perhaps, only help him in his endeavours."

Courtenay realised the wisdom of these words.

"He would have his part all prepared," continued the doctor. "He would absolutely refuse to answer any one who questioned him, you as well as others, and he would be delighted to be taken before the commissary of police, for the commissary, knowing who he is, would never believe him to be a burglar. He would take him for a man of honour, who had sacrificed himself to save a woman's reputation. And everybody else would share the commissary's opinion."

"Never mind!" cried Courtenay. "He shall answer to me!"

"A duel! That would be even worse. A duel about Madame Bréhal! You cannot dream of it. People would ask by what right you championed her cause? And, besides, Pontaumur has just fought, he has killed your friend, and he would almost have the right to refuse another encounter. A man does not go upon the duelling ground two days in succession. Everybody would say that you were wrong, and what would be much worse, Madame Bréhal would never forgive you for dragging her name into a quarrel."

Courtenay trembled with anger. He was at the end of his arguments. "If he comes out while we are here," he said between his teeth, "I think I shall give myself the pleasure of choking him."

"Then we had better both go. The part of a spy is a villainous one. I allowed myself to be led away by an impulse of curiosity which I regret; I saw him go in by a gate which admits one into a waste place. Nothing proves that he could enter Madame Bréhal's garden from that ground. The contrary, indeed, seems probable."

"Yes. But what can he be doing in that deserted enclosure?"

"I don't know, and I don't wish to know. There is a mystery in all this, the explanation of which we shall certainly not arrive at this evening. You must find out all about it later on."

"How so?"

"Why, you often go to see Madame Bréhal; so why shouldn't you tell her simply what I have just seen? Or, if you fear to wound her, you can attain your object by circuitous means. What would prevent you, for instance, from visiting the garden and making sure that the door of communication has not been opened recently. Nothing would be easier, if, as you say, this door is covered with ivy. You could see at a glance if the ivy had been broken or disturbed."

Courtenay was silent. The doctor's logic had finally converted him to more prudent ideas. And yet he did not cease watching the palings behind which Pontaumur had disappeared.

"Come," continued Coulanges, taking his arm, "be a man, old fellow. You do not doubt my discretion, I hope. All this shall remain between ourselves. But let us go, pray. If we remain mounting guard before those palings, we shall end by laughing in one another's faces, for we shall realise that we are ridiculous. Remember, besides, what we have to do to-morrow at Saint-Ouen and in Paris, and do me the kindness to take me home without any more delay. I am going to send my cab away and avail myself of your brougham. I have still to tell you about all that took place at Saint-Ouen after your departure."

Courtenay allowed himself to be led off, but he determined not to let the matter rest there, and whilst obediently accompanying the doctor, he reflected: "Either Pontaumur is the worst of villains, or else Madame Bréhal is a monster of hypocrisy."



## IV.

DR. COULANGES did not have a house of his own, like his friend Courtenay and Madame Bréhal, the pretty widow of the Avenue de Villiers. He occupied a suite of rooms in a fine new house in the Rue de Châteaudun, a pretty suite on the fourth floor, with a balcony, from which there was a superb view.

This doctor *in partibus* was a philosopher, and a practical philosopher, for he had arranged his life according to his tastes, and his tastes were not superior to his fortunes. He was fond of all Parisian pleasures ; and he followed his whims—even as regards the purchase of curios—a pastime which may lead a man to bankruptcy ; however, he only bought objects of art in moderation. He also mingled somewhat in so-called gay circles ; caring little for drawing-rooms. At the races he never bet, however, and the only card game he played was whist. His retinue consisted of a middle-aged woman who cooked his breakfasts, he was an epicure, and a valet of fifteen who opened his door and did his errands. He kept no carriage, of course, nor even a hack, although he rode fairly well and was something of a connoisseur in horses ; his father had bred horses in Normandy. Neither did he ruin himself as regards his taste for bric-à-brac, for he only appreciated bargains patiently secured ; and he did not cover the pictures and old furniture he bought at the auction rooms with gold or notes. He almost always obtained more than his money's worth, and he could have sold his little collection at a large profit.

Coulanges could have cut a dash, like many others, if he had liked, but he was of opinion that a fixed expenditure procured only moderate pleasures, and that it was as well to keep as much money as possible for unexpected fancies. However, what he valued above all, was tranquillity of mind, and this tranquillity, which was so dear to him, had been very much disturbed of late. Three weeks had gone by since that fatal duel, and he was beginning to resume his epicurean habits again, but in the meanwhile he had been obliged to submit to many tribulations.

Maurice Saulieu's death had imposed upon George a variety of duties, of which the good doctor had taken a full share ; and, to complete his annoyance, the two friends had been obliged to appear before an investigating magistrate. The surviving principal and the four seconds of the encounter which had had such a fatal issue narrowly escaped being sent for trial. But, at last, all was settled. They were dismissed by the magistrate, Maurice reposed in the

cemetery of Montmartre, and the excitement occasioned by the tragic event died away.

In Paris things are quickly forgotten. At the club which Coulanges and Courtenay frequented people now scarcely spoke of the unfortunate affair which had for a week been the one subject of conversation. M. de Pontaumur did not put in an appearance at this club, where he had been struck in the face by his adversary now dead and buried ; and his supporter, M. Corléon, only showed his face at the hours when baccarat was played. Thus, Coulanges, who liked the place well enough, was able to go there without being annoyed by the sight of the two men he disliked so heartily:

Courtenay, after having drawn largely on his friend's good-nature, troubled him no longer ; he must have been absorbed by some of his own private affairs, for people now scarcely saw him. Coulanges had met him barely two or three times since the funeral of their unfortunate friend. It must be said, however, that Coulanges did not search for him. He thought that he must be preoccupied with what had happened, on the evening of the duel, on the Boulevard Berthier, and he had no desire to give him fresh advice as regards that matter. It was enough that he had prevented him from committing an act of folly. His friend's love affairs were not his own, and he, on this point, suspected that Courtenay was not indifferent to Madame Bréhal. He had not even deemed it proper to inquire about the young girl whom Saulieu was to have married. He did not know her, and he did not desire to know her, any more than he desired to know how Saulieu had left his property. George, without entering into any explanations about the contents of the pocket-book, had simply told him that it did not contain a will, and he had asked nothing more.

Delivered from the cares which had worried him, the doctor might, therefore, have become as peaceably happy as previously, and yet he had not recovered the serenity of which he was so proud, that cheerfulness "compounded of contempt for fortuitous circumstances," which was his strong point, and which Rabelais, his favourite author, called Pantagruelism. In reality, our friend the doctor was tormented by a sort of remorse. He reproached himself for not having told everything to the magistrate. He had not spoken to any one, not even to George, of the bullet he had picked up on the duelling ground ; and he knew that if he had shown it the course of events might have been materially changed.

He had preserved that wooden bullet, and carefully locked it up in a drawer, but this precaution was a useless one, since he abstained from acting upon his original intention, which had been to start a personal investigation into the conduct of Pontaumur and his acolyte, before and since the duel. He now said to himself that this discovery proved absolutely nothing ; that the wooden bullet had surely not come from Maurice's pistol, since Corléon could not have inserted it into that barrel of the weapon, and, besides, he

had proposed that the pistols should be allotted by chance. The doctor also said to himself that the bullet had, perhaps, fallen there on another occasion, for this was probably not the first time people had fought with pistols in the redoubt of Gennevilliers. He finally argued that it was too late to utilise the projectile for purposes of inquiry, since its authenticity would appear doubtful to everybody. This reasoning did not, however, completely satisfy his conscience, and thus it was in vain that he tried to dismiss the haunting problem.

He had the box of pistols; he had paid for the weapons, and he had the right to keep them. But this box incessantly reminded him of his worries, and it occurred to him to return it, with its contents, to the gunsmith who had sold it to him.

On that particular day he was in a festive mood; he had been breakfasting with a young person who proposed coming out before the footlights of a third-rate theatre, and who occasionally came to consult him when she had anything the matter with her throat. The amiable doctor's speciality was the larynx, and this is a speciality which procures a physician admission into the slips of theatres where operettas are sung, and obtains him a practice among pretty women. Coulanges attended them gratis, and generally prescribed champagne, which agreed with them remarkably well, especially when he provided the purchase money.

Delphine Grabas, better known in theatrical and other circles as Madame du Raincy, was one of his patients, and on the least excuse she hastened to see her dear Coulanges. On the day we allude to, she was singing an air from the "*Petite Mariée*," accompanying herself upon the piano, in a room which was a little museum, where the doctor delighted to lounge and smoke and contemplate his beloved bric-à-brac. But he had left upon a table the offensive box of pistols, which annoyed him to such a point that he felt inclined to throw it out of the window. However, at that moment the idea of selling it again to the gunsmith occurred to him, and having decided upon that course he listened absently to the warbling of his young friend, and arranged in his head his programme for the day.

There was to be a picture sale in which he was interested at the Hôtel Drouot; and he decided that he would go there, but first stop at Galand's to ask him to take back the box of pistols at any price he liked.

He had just formed this resolution when he was called out of the room for a moment. He left Mademoiselle Delphine to her operetta, and he intended, when he returned, to dismiss her, as she had previously declared that she had a rehearsal at two o'clock. Coulanges did not believe a single word of it, but it pleased him to pretend to believe it, so that he might not have to devote his entire afternoon to her.

When he re-entered the room she had left the piano, and was busily engaged in examining the various objects which littered the

side tables and the mantel-piece. He was accustomed to her familiar ways and he tolerated them, but this time they made him angry and he knew why, for she suddenly opened the pistol-case and played with one of the pistols.

"What are you doing?" he exclaimed, abruptly. "Those toys are not made for little girls." And he snatched the weapon away from her.

"Oh! you brute!" cried Delphine. "You have hurt me! Look! you have drawn blood," she added, showing the palm of her hand.

Coulanges was often hasty, but he was also tender-hearted, and the sufferings of women always moved him. He placed the pistol upon the table, and, before examining the scratch, he very gallantly kissed the injured hand. This kiss had the effect of immediately calming the young woman, who remarked: "I shall not die of it: but you might have been a little more gentle."

"I was wrong, certainly, and I ask your pardon. But I don't like to see you play with fire-arms; one never knows whether they are loaded or not. And, besides, how could I foresee that I was going to hurt you? Let me see this terrible wound."

"You are laughing at me, you heartless fellow."

"No, indeed? Ah! I shall not be obliged to amputate your pretty hand, but I must have hurt you very much. The skin is torn off."

"Of course it is. I am sure that I shall be marked for life."

"I can't understand how the rubbing of the palm of your hand against a smooth surface could tear off the skin."

"In the first place you ought to know that my skin is very delicate. And then you can talk as much as you please about your smooth surface, but I am certain that it was a nail which scratched me."

"A nail!" repeated Coulanges. "You are dreaming, my dear. There are no nails in the butt-end of a pistol."

"A nail or a pin, or whatever you like. But it was something pointed. Look and see."

The doctor took the weapon up again and examined it. To his great amazement, he discovered near the butt the head of a tiny steel screw which jutted out a little from the wood.

It was certainly not the maker who had placed it there, for it served no purpose whatever, except to annoy any person who used the weapon. The idea then came to Coulanges that Saulieu had had the disadvantage of using this weapon in the fatal duel, but he soon reflected that Saulieu would have perceived the screw, and would not have failed to draw his second's attention to the suspicious circumstance. Then he suddenly remembered that Corléon had proposed that the pistols should be selected at random, from under a handkerchief, and he began to understand matters. "Yes," he thought, "that fine gentleman would have thrown a coin into the air, and if Pontaurmur had cried tails, he would have arranged to let

tails fall ; Pontaumur would then have had the choice, and he would have taken the good one, the one I had loaded with a real bullet, for he knew that it was marked, and would have recognised it by the touch. Decidedly, it is no longer possible for me to doubt the treachery of Maurice's adversary. George's poor friend died virtually assassinated."

"Well, what do you say?" asked Delphine, wiping her wound with a fine cambric handkerchief. "Will you still maintain that one can't be scratched by handling a pistol? If I were a man, and a gunmaker sold me such a badly-made weapon, I would make him give me my money back."

Coulanges was scarcely listening. He was examining the other pistol, and found it all right. There was no screw jutting out at the butt. It was impossible to imagine that the presence of the screw in the weapon which Pontaumur had used was due to the gunsmith. He thought for a moment of questioning the maker; but that would be an act of gross imprudence; the duel and its fatal result were known to everybody, and the maker would wonder who had driven this suspicious screw into the butt of one of the weapons, and he would not keep the affair a secret. A rumour would spread that criminal trickery had been practised by one of the seconds, and public indignation would be aroused. It would be necessary to prove that the box had not passed into the doctor's hands until after the duel, and, if Corléon should deny that, as he was capable of doing, it would be difficult to prove it. The investigation would probably be resumed, and, in any case, Coulanges and his friend Courtenay would be suspected. It was better to keep silent than to run such a risk, and Coulanges promptly decided to hold his tongue. As he had begun by being reticent he could not depart from this course, under penalty of being compromised, and if his conscience told him that he did wrong not to act, his temperament became easily resigned to inactivity, or at least to expectation, for he still flattered himself that the truth would be discovered without his proclaiming it. He tried to persuade himself that Providence would intervene some day or other, although he was no believer in miracles.

"To think that I loaded it, and perceived nothing," he thought, as he closed the box.

"What are you thinking of, doctor?" now asked Delphine, laughing. "Is it my accident that makes you so melancholy? I assure you that I am not in the least angry, and to show you that I forgive you, I will devote my day to you. We will take a drive in the Bois, dine in the Champs-Élysées, and in the evening you shall take me to one of the concerts."

"You don't rehearse to-day, then?"

"Yes, there is a rehearsal, but I shall sacrifice dramatic art for your sake. I shall be fined, no doubt, but I don't care; besides, you will pay the fine."

"With pleasure; but—I am engaged. I dine out this evening, and now I have to go to the Rue Drouot to see if I can pick up a picture I want, at a fair price."

"A sale! that suits me. You can give me a China vase or a Japanese idol with big enamelled eyes, I adore things of that kind; or if you find that is too dear, you can buy me something else, I don't care what; you owe me something you know, for hurting me with your wretched pistol. I sha'n't be able to play a note on the piano for a week."

"I hope that you are not going to tell every one at the theatre that you were hurt at my house," said Coulanges, who feared her chattering.

"No, not if you take me to the auction. You have no idea how it amuses me to see the auctioneers play with their hammers. Oh! I sha'n't bother you. When I have my little present, I will take it home and leave you to bid for your picture."

"Excuse me, I——"

"Not a word more, doctor, or you will lose me for a patient. The next time my throat pains me, I shall consult another physician."

"That threat decides me," said Coulanges, gaily. "But make haste. It is past two o'clock. The sale must have begun, and I don't want the Clouet of my dreams to be knocked down to some one else—a jewel of a portrait it is, which ought to be in the Louvre, and which I shall obtain, perhaps, for fifteen louis. The collection isn't a well-known one, and the big dealers won't be there."

"I will be ready in three seconds. I can put on my gloves as we go along, not the right one, of course."

"Well, I am waiting."

Coulanges put the box of pistols away in a cupboard, resolving never to touch it again, and then led his patient off; she was no longer complaining.

In the street he hailed a cab, and five minutes afterwards he alighted with Delphine outside the Hôtel des Ventes where the Paris auction rooms are located.

The young actress was not very well acquainted with the place, and she was about to direct her footsteps towards the rooms on the ground-floor, where the effects of poor people who have not settled their bills or paid their rents are sold, but Coulanges assured her that she would only find there some battered chairs and kitchen utensils, and not the least vestige of a Japanese idol. Thus he had no difficulty in persuading her to follow him to the first floor where objects of art and handsome furniture are disposed of. He even obtained her permission to make some inquiries about the Clouet he wished to secure, and the expert superintending the sale having assured him that the picture would not be put up until four o'clock, he led her into a neighbouring room where an auctioneer was already hard at work.

There were pyramids of arm-chairs, cascades of silk curtains,

and quantities of old oaken sideboards, and ebony desks. In the rear even there were ranged different China vases of more or less authentic make. The doctor saw at a glance that these goods came from different sources, and had been brought together to make up a sale; and he realised that connoisseurs would not find anything really worth having in the whole lot. However, he might here obtain for Delphine the nick-nack she wanted. Thus he amused himself with praising the merits of two imitation Chinese vases, which could probably be purchased at a modest price.

"Pooh!" ejaculated his companion; "I don't absolutely want any pottery. A pretty little rosewood chiffonier would suit me, or an inlaid table. There is a deal of spare room in my place, too much room, alas! and if you are kind, you will let me choose. Oh! I'll be discreet; I won't let you spend too much money, but you can at least spare me three-quarters of an hour."

This prospect did not gladden Coulanges by any means, but he yielded with the best grace possible. He even procured a chair for Delphine, and stood behind her to aid her with his experience.

The sale did not progress very rapidly. The people present were mostly idlers, and there were no opulent amateur collectors in the throng which pressed about the show table and examined the different objects. However, as Coulanges glanced over the motley assembly, he perceived M. Corléon standing near the auctioneer's desk, among a more select circle.

There was nothing very surprising in this; M. Corléon undoubtedly had the right to come, like any one else, to the auction rooms; but the doctor, who entered the place every day or two, had never seen him there before; and, in fact, since the duel, he had not met him anywhere. When he perceived this shady personage he experienced almost the same sensation as comes over one when one happens to tread on a reptile, and then he began to wonder why Corléon was there. He could hardly have come to purchase any furniture, for he had been established in Paris for some time; nor could it be to purchase any objects of art, for the sale had absolutely nothing artistic about it. Moreover, Corléon was not the kind of man to let himself be taken in with bric-à-brac.

Coulanges, after a moment's reflection, decided that, after all, he might very well have come there simply to kill time, and to amuse himself with the bustle and movement of the sale. This is a common diversion, and there are people who spend their days at the Hôtel Drouot and never purchase anything. They stroll about, and glance at the curios, and ogle the pretty women who come there in full force whenever diamonds or lace are being sold. However, it is seldom that these people take up a position in the corner reserved for the serious purchasers, who are known, at least by sight, to the auctioneers. Now, this was what M. Corléon had done.

The sale proceeded, and everything went at ridiculously low prices. It seemed as if the second-hand dealers had leagued together

to secure the spoils offered to their rapacity at as paltry a figure as possible. No one bid against them, for fear of paying tribute to the monopolising band, which does not willingly allow any outsider to cut the grass from under its feet. It must be said, however, that the goods so far offered were but old-fashioned clocks, faded curtains, and horse-hair scated chairs. There was nothing interesting in the scene, and M. Corléon certainly seemed to take no pleasure in it, for he kept his eyes fixed on the ceiling.

The doctor, also, did not find the sale interesting, for he leaned over to whisper in Delphine's ear : "There is no fun here, and as I see nothing which you would like, I advise you to go. We can come again some other time."

"No, no !" she replied quickly. "I am here, and here I remain. Everything is going for nothing. It is a superb opportunity ; and I have discovered a little piece of furniture which I think would suit me exactly."

"Where is it ?"

"Over there, near the big mirror."

Coulanges perceived the article which Delphine referred to, and an odd-looking thing it was. From a distance it was almost impossible to guess what it really was. For instance, there was a massive tablet with carved feet, and, above that, a perfect edifice of ebony with drawers and shelves. This piece of furniture might serve to keep a woman's work in, or a collection of medals or even books.

Delphine must have had execrable taste to select such an object, but the doctor took care not to disgust her with it, for fear that she should take a fancy to something likely to fetch a higher price. He was even cunning enough to whisper to her : "It is very original, indeed. I have never seen anything like it, and you will be able to boast of possessing something unique. We must find out when this ebony curiosity will be put up for sale."

"Go and ask the auctioneer to put it up at once."

Coulanges, who was longing to finish the matter, was easily persuaded to use his influence. He had often done so, and he was known in the rooms as an amateur. Frequenters of the auction rooms are granted privileges, as he knew right well. However, just as he was about to step forward, he saw M. Corléon lean over and speak to the auctioneer, pointing to some object in the room.

"Dear me !" thought the doctor, "I really begin to believe that that fellow has come here to buy something. I should like to know what."

He had not long to wait, for the auctioneer raised his head, and then said gravely to one of his men :

"Place that ebony chiffonier upon the table ; yes, that one near the mirror. Be quick !"

"It seems that it is a chiffonier," muttered the doctor. "I should never have guessed it. Has Monsieur de Pontaurmur's friend



an idea of purchasing the very article that Delphine has set her heart upon? That would be droll, indeed."

The men slowly lifted the chiffonier, and placed it upon the long table, half a dozen paces from Delphine, who turned to say to Coulanges: "It is just what I want. But you must bid. I don't dare to. You know how timid I am."

"No; I had never observed it," laughed the doctor. "However, since you wish it, I will attend to the bidding. You understand, however: your choice is made, and you won't regret your Japanese idol?"

"Not at all. Go ahead; only so much the worse for you, if it costs you a thousand francs."

Coulanges smiled. He expected to be quits with the young actress for a twentieth part of that sum.

"Gentlemen," commenced the auctioneer, who was a natural wit, "here, at last, is an object of art, a veritable object of art; a secretary with drawers and compartments in pure Empire style, the whole in massive ebony, and in very good condition."

"Ah! so it is a secretary now," chuckled one of the dealers.

"Let us see, gentlemen; how much shall we say for this object of art? An interesting old piece of furniture, but in as good condition as if it were new," said the auctioneer's crier. "It is worth five hundred francs, if it is worth a copper."

This statement provoked a burst of laughter.

"Come, gentlemen, come. Shall we say four hundred francs? Three hundred francs? Some one said two hundred, I think?"

No one had breathed a word.

"A bid, gentlemen!" continued the auctioneer's crier. "You wish to see the inside, madame? There!" he added, pulling open the drawers.

It was Delphine who had requested this, in spite of the timidity of which she boasted. She rose up to examine the chiffonier, and was, no doubt, pleased with her inspection, for she nodded her head in token of approbation.

"You still like it?" asked Coulanges.

"Of course I do. I am sure I shall discover some secret compartments in it, and it will amuse me to hunt for them; and when I have found them I shall keep my love-letters inside."

"Twenty-five francs," now said one of the bystanders, hesitatingly.

"Twenty-five francs!" exclaimed the auctioneer. "That is absurd, gentlemen. Twenty-five francs would not represent even the value of the ebony employed in manufacturing this masterpiece." And as no one spoke, he added: "Please notice, gentlemen, that the feet of the table are very curious. They are evidently not of the same date as the rest of the work, but they were turned by a very skilful workman, or rather by an artist. Observe the delicacy of the work; I can even perceive some incrustations of ivory."

"Five francs more for the ivory," called out an old woman.

Coulanges saw that the feet must, indeed, have been recently added. They were quite new and of different ornamentation to the rest of the chiffonier; still they added nothing to its value.

"Well?" whispered Delphine. "Speak up."

"Let me alone; you don't understand anything about it," responded the doctor, who piqued himself on knowing how and when to bid.

"Thirty francs, gentlemen. That's no price," cried the auctioneer. "See how it is carved."

"Thirty-five," said the first bidder.

"Gentlemen, we are wasting our time, and the sale is a heavy one. One decent bid and I knock it down. Will no one answer? Then forty francs, by me. It shall not be said that a charming piece of furniture, which is in the best style of the First Empire, and which belonged to the first consul perhaps, was sold by me for thirty-five francs."

"Fifty francs," now exclaimed a voice which Coulanges recognised as that of M. Corléon.

"Ah! Ah!" thought the doctor. "It appears that it is really that ridiculous thing he wants. This is odd. That fellow does nothing without a motive, and he must have a reason for bidding. What can it be? I can't guess. But we shall see if he really wishes to acquire a piece of furniture which I would not accept as a gift."

"Sixty," now said Coulanges, raising his voice, so as to be heard throughout the whole room.

"It was time you spoke," whispered Delphine. "I was beginning to wonder if you were dumb."

M. Corléon, in bidding, had stepped out of the group gathered together near the auctioneer's desk, but when the doctor spoke he immediately retreated. "He hadn't noticed me," thought Coulanges, "and now he has recognised me. He is probably going to withdraw. I don't see him any more. Ah! he is talking to that old fellow who has his back turned. But, I am not mistaken, that old fellow is Salomon the dealer. Good! I have it! Corléon has given him a commission to bid for him. He probably imagines that I haven't seen him, and he doesn't wish me to know that he is bidding for the chiffonier. Why all this mystery? Well, I won't let him have it anyhow."

"Seventy francs," now said Salomon, who was an old Jew, a frequenter of the auction rooms, and very much in request among timid amateurs, who were afraid to bid themselves. He had the reputation of being very skilful in his way and he made a good deal of money, which did not prevent him from going about dressed like a beggar. He wore a long greasy coat of no particular colour and had an unkempt beard, not unlike that of the Wandering Jew.

"One hundred francs," now said the doctor, who knew that a brisk rise in the bidding was equivalent to a challenge,

"We shall see now what Corléon means," he thought.

"A hundred and twenty," mumbled Salomon.

"Oh! oh!" thought Coulanges. "This is becoming serious."

The dealers were laughing in their sleeves. They had divined that two outsiders were going to fight for the possession of a piece of furniture for which the boldest of them would not have given three louis. The auctioneer, astonished by his success, and scenting a struggle, had risen from his seat to urge on the competitors. "Where are we, gentlemen?" he asked. "Some one said a hundred and twenty francs, I think, but we shall not rest there."

"Fifty," cried Coulanges.

"One hundred and fifty," repeated the auctioneer, squinting at old Salomon.

The venerable Hebrew made a sign.

"One hundred and seventy-five! Two hundred by the gentleman opposite. Nothing more, eh? I am going to knock it down, gentlemen."

Here the hammer was raised—the famous hammer which plays so great a part at the end of hotly contested sales. At the outset it rests upon the auctioneer's table, like a sword in its sheath; but when the proper moment comes, it is changed into a sword of Damocles, which the auctioneer holds suspended above the heads of the combatants. In the art of wielding it lies the superiority of the masters of the auctioneering craft. There is a threatening movement which makes big bids flow forth like the water once flowed from the rock struck by Moses, and then skilfully calculated pauses, which draw bank-notes out of people's pockets as surely as an hydraulic machine draws water from the soil.

The auctioneer on duty that day was one of the best of his trade, and he knew his business thoroughly. Coulanges was a favourite of his, and, if he had consulted his feelings, he would have dealt the final blow at the bid of two hundred francs. But his partiality for his profession carried him away, and he thought that he ought to prolong the business. He raised his hammer, he lowered it to within three inches of the table, then he raised it again and made it describe sundry capricious circles. He looked like the leader of an orchestra conducting his musicians with a baton.

Salomon timidly bid another twenty-five francs, and at this moment Coulanges, who had good eyes, saw that M. Corléon, who was behind the Jew, pulled him by his coat to give him the signal to speak. The doctor, however, was determined, and did not hesitate to raise the sum to the respectable amount of three hundred francs. This was very dear for a chiffonier, although it was made of ebony, and Delphine, who was a good girl, said to him: "Don't go too far. I don't wish to ruin you. And besides, if you are to pay a big price for it, you know, why I—I should prefer a ring or a bracelet."

"Those fellows are fools," said the dealer who had bid twenty-

five francs at the beginning. "The thing's worth a hundred francs, not a copper more."

Salomon meanwhile showed evident signs of uneasiness. He passed his fingers nervously through his beard. He had evidently promised M. Corléon that he would obtain the chiffonier for a dozen louis, to which one more was to be added for his commission.

"It is your turn," cried the auctioneer. And at a wink from the Jew, he added, "Three hundred and twenty-five francs."

"Four hundred," cried Coulanges, in a rage.

This time it was a regular declaration of war. It was as much as to say: "Go as high as you please, I shall not yield."

Salomon understood it so, and, not daring to trust to the repeated pulls at his coat, he turned round to consult the capitalist he represented. He chose his time badly, for the auctioneer, who was not sorry to render himself agreeable to M. Coulanges, continued in a lower tone: "Gentlemen, no one seems to bid any more. I warn you that I am about to knock it down;" and at the same time he lowered his hammer towards the desk. "We are at four hundred, for the third and last time, four hundred. It is four hundred?" he repeated interrogatively.

"Yes, four hundred," said the crier.

"Going, going——"

Salomon turned round, and now feeling sure of approval, he pronounced two words which were to have been followed by others. He meant to say four hundred and fifty, but the sound of the hammer cut his bid short. Undesirous of awaiting the pleasure of a gentleman whom he did not know, the auctioneer, in a voice from which there was no appeal, had already exclaimed: "Gone!"

The Jew opened his mouth to protest, but the auctioneer launched a severe look at him, imposing silence.

"To whom? To you, sir?"

Coulanges, thus appealed to, shook his head, and taking a pencil out of his pocket began to write the name and address of Madame du Raincy upon a leaf torn out of his note-book.

"It is all right," said the auctioneer to his clerk. "The name will be sent up. Gentlemen, we will now sell a very beautiful mahogany bedstead."

The bedstead did not interest the doctor however, and Delphine, who could not restrain her delight, had already risen up. "How kind you are," she said, leaning upon Coulanges' arm. "It was dear all the same, but it looks very nice. Lucie of the Bouffes has a chiffonier which she's awfully proud of, but it isn't nearly so fine as that one. They will send it to my house to-morrow, I suppose?"

"This evening, if you like. And, indeed, as it is not very heavy, I advise you to have it removed at once by a messenger," said Coulanges, who was stealthily observing M. Corléon's movements. M. de Pontaumur's friend had a discomfited air, but he did not seem inclined to quit the place.

"That is a good idea," replied Delphine to the doctor, "but how about the money to pay for it? I have only got ten francs with me."

The doctor at once handed her a five hundred franc note.

"You can keep what remains," he said. "Only do me the kindness to settle the bill in person, and return and tell me if any one speaks to you. I will wait in the passage."

"Whatever you wish," cried Delphine. "You are the best fellow in the world."

"And if, by chance, any one offers to purchase the chiffonier from you at a higher price, promise me not to accept."

"There is no danger of that. The first present you ever made me! Never in the world! Even if that old Mordecai over there offered me a hundred louis."

Coulanges conducted Delphine to the door, and while waiting for her, he walked up and down the passage.

"I have made a fool of myself," he thought. "Courtenay would have laughed, if he had seen me, and yet, I thought that in bidding for that chiffonier, I might circumvent Corléon. I do not know why it is, but I imagine that in that ugly affair something will be found relative to poor Saulieu's murder, for he was murdered certainly; the discovery of the screw in the pistol has removed my last doubts on that score. Find something? Yes! But what? I confess I have no idea. I shall go to see Delphine to-morrow, and, if necessary, I will demolish the table and the stand above it, to see what there is inside, providing of course, that she does not let it go. But no, she would not dare to sell the first present I ever gave her."

While he was reflecting in this strain the picture sale was going on in the front room, and the sound of the bids reached his ears. "I am afraid that they will sell my Clouet," he growled. "Delphine will never finish; I have a great mind to go in and hurry her up. But no; I should find myself face to face with Corléon, and he has already seen too much of me. If he speaks to Delphine, I shall hear of it, and that will be proof positive that he has strong reasons for wanting that chiffonier; but what these reasons are I cannot guess, unless he has really taken a fancy to an article which, for my own part, I would throw out of the window, if it were brought to my house."

At this moment, Delphine re-appeared, preceding a porter who bore the chiffonier upon his back. She was evidently delighted with her acquisition, for her eyes sparkled and her face beamed with joy.

"Well?" asked Coulanges.

"My dear doctor, everybody has complimented me."

"Upon what? Your figure? Your teeth, eh? That does not astonish me."

"No, no, upon my purchase. The auctioneer told me that it was worth twice what I had paid for it."

"The auctioneer was laughing at you."

"Not at all! The old bearded Jew, too, offered me fifty francs more than it cost, but I sent him to the right-about."

"Did no one else speak to you?"

"Yes, a very nice gentleman whom I had not noticed before."

"Ah! and what did he say to you?"

"That I was charming."

"Is that all?"

"But that was quite enough. Do you imagine he asked me for my address? Other people treat me with respect. It is only you who don't."

"No, because I'm so partial to you," said the doctor, gallantly.

"And, now, if you will take my advice, my dear Delphine, you will go home with that precious object which old Salomon wanted to get from you, and, if you wish to please me, you won't touch it till I have examined it."

"Do you think that there is a treasure hidden in it? That *would* be luck and no mistake!"

"No, but it needs cleaning. I know how it ought to be done and will tell you. I shall come and see you to-morrow."

"Not at my rehearsal hour, because my art, you know, is sacred."

"I shall come before or after. And, meanwhile, if I were in your place, I should take a cab and have the chiffonier put on the box."

"You are right. And then, that gentleman could not follow me. I don't care to make new acquaintances. Till to-morrow, then. Do you know, my hand does not hurt me at all now; you have cured me, doctor, with a five hundred franc note. Those little bits of paper are sovereign remedies for scratches."

Coulanges did not care to prolong this colloquy in the passage. He said good-bye to Delphine, who went off, pushing the messenger before her, and he returned to give a glance at the sale. There was no longer any disputing over the lots; as fast as they were put up they were knocked down to the first or second bidder. The doctor had the satisfaction of seeing that Corléon was still there, and that he evinced no intention of retiring; he was talking in a low voice to old Salomon.

"I was certainly mistaken," thought Coulanges. "He came to buy something else, not that ebony chiffonier, and my fancies lacked common sense. They cost me twenty-five louis, though. Still at last, I am rid of Delphine, who would not have left me all day, and I can dispose of my time as I wish. At present, I will go to see about the collection of M. Van K., a distinguished amateur of Rotterdam, as the advertisements have it. With the exception of my Clouet, that worthy M. Van K., of Rotterdam, merely possessed some daubs."

With this conclusion, the doctor hurried into the next room, and, as he entered, he had the misfortune to meet an amateur whom

he knew and who was carrying that identical Clouet away under his arm. It was necessary to give it up ; the purchaser was not one of those who traffic, and he appeared too delighted with the bargain he had made for Coulanges to proffer the suggestion that he should part with it.

"Bah !" he thought, by way of consolation, "my visit to the Hôtel Drouot has already cost me five hundred francs. That is quite enough for to-day. I will go and have a look at the horse-show. With such pleasant weather, all Paris will be there."

Thereupon, without further deliberation, he descended the grand staircase, but not without turning more than once, for he could not get M. Corléon out of his head, despite his resolve to think no more of him ; and he was still wondering if Monsieur de Pontaurmur's friend would not follow Delphine and the ebony chiffonier. However, he did not perceive him, and he decided to enter his cab, which he had left at the door.

When he arrived at the Palais de l'Industrie, where the horse show was being held, he saw that all Paris, the all Paris of the races and first performances, was indeed there. There you saw the old gentleman, who is still a superb rider, in spite of his seventy years, and who looks magnificent on horseback, and is always applauded by the ladies in the galleries, whom he still ogles and will ogle as long as he lives. The young officer in civilian's clothes, too, is there as recognisable as if he were in uniform, with the old general who declares that in his time horses cost much less and were worth a great deal more. Then there is the provincial sportsman who comes there to attend to his little business, and who asks advice of no one, because he knows things better than anybody else. You also espy the connoisseur who gives gratuitous counsel to people whom he does not know ; the broker who carries favour with everybody, and procures dogs and coachmen as well as horses and carriages ; the journalist who takes notes ; and the gentleman who is never seen anywhere except on foot, but who wishes to pass for a great judge of horse-flesh, although he never buys anything.

Coulanges knew them all, and they no longer amused him. He had mainly come to see pretty faces and elegant toilets, and he was not disappointed. The galleries were filled with women of society, and even of high society, those who are fond of horses because they have always had steeds of their own. The women of a lower grade in society, those whose husbands had recently become wealthy, were also in full force, but they preferred to walk about on the arms of their friends, consulting them as to the purchase of an equipage promised by their husbands. And yellow-haired damsels were not lacking either, especially in the arena. They paid particular attention to the carriages, and even entered them under pretext of trying the springs. Moreover, they sometimes found a gentleman willing to buy them the victoria of their dreams.

Coulanges, however, was not a gentleman of that kind. He had

expended enough money on Delphine that afternoon, and he had no desire to throw any more away. Some of his patients tried to stop him, but he extricated himself from their midst, and passed on.

Half way across the arena, as he turned aside to avoid a group of gentlemen who were discussing the advantages and disadvantages of the French system of horse breaking, he almost knocked against George Courtenay, who was coming in the opposite direction.

"By Jove! this is a fortunate meeting!" exclaimed the doctor, taking his friend's arm. "Where have you been, old man? I never see you now. I was wondering if you were angry with me."

"Angry with you?" replied George. "Why?"

"You will laugh at me perhaps, but I imagined that after that foolish adventure of ours on the Boulevard Berthier you had not forgiven me for mixing myself up in what didn't concern me."

"You are entirely mistaken. I no longer think of all that, and the proof of it is, that Monsieur de Pontamur is here, and I have just returned the bow with which he favoured me."

"What! did he dare to bow to you?" exclaimed Coulanges.

"Certainly he did," replied Courtenay. "It's a well-known fact that one ought to salute one's adversaries when one has saluted them on the duelling-ground. And I should have made a mistake if I had not returned his bow, for I have no personal grievance against him. It is annoying for me to meet him since he killed poor Saulieu, but I cannot forbid him to come here."

"You spoke very differently on the evening of that unfortunate duel, and I am pleased to hear that you have come to a more sensible frame of mind. It is evident that if a fellow never forgot anything, life would become unbearable. Paris is full of people whom I detest, but whom I elbow without feeling the need of flying at their throats."

"Well, my dear Coulanges, on the evening when we watched together for that man who had entered the enclosure belonging to Madame Bréhal, I was not cool, and I really believe that if Monsieur de Pontamur had reappeared—admitting it was he——"

"Which was not proven," interrupted the doctor.

"If he had reappeared," continued Courtenay, "I should willingly have strangled him; but I have reflected a great deal since that evening, and I am of opinion now that you were quite right when you said that a gentleman ought not to play the spy. In fact, I am very much obliged to you for having reminded me that I had no right to watch over Madame Bréhal's conduct."

"Don't let us speak any more of that, but tell me how you are getting on with the settlement of poor Saulieu's affairs. He appointed you his executor, if I am not mistaken."

"No, he didn't, very fortunately. He only asked me, before he died, to take the pocket-book which he carried—but you know that."

"Yes; the one perforated by Monsieur de Pontamur's bullet, the one which contained a woman's portrait."



"Well, with that photo I only found some unimportant papers. A note which spoke of a will, but no will could be discovered."

"Saulieu's will must have been deposited with his notary."

"I thought so, but the notary never received one. I should have searched elsewhere, but Maurice's heirs arrived in Paris, three provincial cousins, whom Maurice never saw, and whom he thought little about; nevertheless, they were his legal heirs. They had learned through the papers of their relative's death, and they did not trouble themselves about seeing me. They asked the proper authorities for an authorisation to remove the seals from Maurice's effects, and obtained it. I was then told of what was taking place, and I went to Saulieu's apartment. I there found these gentlemen, who seemed quite at home, and did not receive me very politely."

"Indeed, that was too bad! What! you his intimate friend!"

"It was so, my dear fellow. Provincials, you know, are often avaricious and ill-mannered. If you could have seen the suspicious looks these fellows cast at me! They imagined, I believe, that I had a will, which bequeathed me Maurice's fortune, in my pocket."

"Saulieu would have done right had he disinherited them."

"If he had done so to my advantage I should have refused the legacy, but I agree with you that he ought to have disposed of his property in a certain way, instead of letting it go to such people."

"Well, I am convinced that he did dispose of it."

"That is quite possible; but it is no longer any business of mine. I gave it all up, after almost throwing Saulieu's pocket-book at his cousins' heads. I merely kept a letter addressed to myself."

"And the portrait? But you will think that I am very curious!"

"I still have the portrait," responded Courtenay, curtly. "Come, let us talk of something else."

"I ask nothing better," rejoined Coulanges, who did not consider the moment opportune to speak of his adventure at the auction rooms. He thought of it, however, in connection with the story of the lost will. And yet his common sense told him that M. Corléon had no interest in recovering this will, for Maurice Saulieu had certainly not chosen one of his enemies for his heir.

"I came here to buy a saddle-horse," now said Courtenay, "and I have not seen a single one I like. I have a great mind to go to the club, where I haven't been for a long time, and dine there."

"In that case I am your man, my dear Courtenay," replied the doctor; "and, 'pon my word, I am delighted to see you return to your old habits. I have missed you greatly, I assure you, for I pass most of my time at the club, and when you are not there I never have much amusement. But dinner is served at seven o'clock, and we have a long time before us yet. So I confess I should like to walk about a little in front of the galleries and see the pretty faces."

"My poor Coulanges, still the same. The women will ruin you."

"Pooh! I have never been in love in my life, and I never shall be. I hope as much for you."

"You say that as if you thought I were in love," said George.

"You know very well that I never occupy myself with my friends' affairs; and, moreover, even if you were in love——" But at that moment the doctor paused, and, lowering his voice, exclaimed: "Why, here is a lady coming towards us; no, towards you, for I don't know her. She is no longer young, but still presentable."

George perceived the person spoken of by Coulanges, and made a movement to avoid her. "Too late, my friend," whispered the doctor. "She is aware that you have perceived her, and unless you intend to be rude——"

It was indeed too late to draw back. Courtenay made a slight gesture of impatience, but he made no further effort to conceal himself, although he disliked the person who was approaching, and had done so especially since the duel in which his friend Saulieu had been killed. This person was none other than Madame Fresnay, Marianne Mezenc's aunt. She might have been forty-five, and must once have been very beautiful; but she had retained too vivid a remembrance of this fact, and with her corpulence, which approached the majestic, the vaporous airs she assumed appeared ridiculous. She advanced, flanked by two very young men, who might have been taken for her pages, and who were exceedingly attentive. And in order that nothing should be lacking to this disagreeable encounter, George noticed that her flaring costume was creating a sensation.

"You have also abandoned me, my dear sir," she said, in a mincing manner. "I expected to receive a call from you after that unfortunate event."

George bowed without replying. It required an effort on his part to abstain from acting rudely to this silly woman, who spoke of social duties in connection with Maurice's death.

"I say 'you, also,'" continued the lady, "for my niece has judged fit to desert my house. You knew nothing of it, I suppose? Well, I must tell you that Marianne is an ingrate. I took so much pains to find her a husband, and it certainly was not my fault if she lost him."

"Are you quite sure of that, madame?" interrupted George, thoroughly exasperated.

"I don't understand, sir," resumed Madame Fresnay, impudently. "But I want to tell you that Mademoiselle Mezenc is now tied to the apron-strings of Madame Bréhal. She is decorating a summer drawing-room in that lady's house. She is installed there permanently, and I understand that Madame Bréhal has undertaken to marry her. I hope she will succeed; as for myself, I have renounced the task. Good-bye. If you meet my niece, pray tell her that I am not angry with her."

Madame Fresnay thereupon walked off, playing with her fan, and followed by her two cavaliers, who had lost nothing of this discourse. George meanwhile was pale with anger, and as for the doctor, he did not exactly know what to think,

"What was the matter with her?" he muttered, "and what was her motive for accosting you in that fashion to complain about her niece, who was to have married our friend?"

"Supposing I told you that she caused Maurice's death?"

"What do you say?"

"Oh, nothing; I prefer to be silent. But let us go. I am stifling."

"Indeed! Well, I don't wish to cause you any suffering. Let us go, then, by all means, but let me just give a glance at the galleries, which seem to me to be full of lovely women."

"Be quick with your glance, then," returned Courtenay, following Coulanges with regret.

"Quite a *parterre* of flowers," murmured the enthusiastic doctor. "Is it the effect of the spring? I can't say. Still I find them all charming, and how exquisitely they are dressed! To think that I don't know one of all those great ladies. That is what comes from being too lazy to go into society. Ah! my dear fellow! just look at those two lovely creatures! Sisters, perhaps. No, one is dark and pale, the other rosy and fair. Dear me! if I had to choose between them, I should be seriously embarrassed."

Courtenay looked up in an absent way, but his face abruptly changed as he recognised Mademoiselle Mezenc and Madame Bréhal.

"Oh! look!" cried Coulanges. "They are bowing to you. See! the blonde is motioning to you. Come, introduce me."

This time also, but for different reasons, Courtenay would willingly have avoided the proffered honour. He obeyed the signal, however, and joined Madame Bréhal, saluting her as ceremoniously as possible. His coldness failed to take effect though, for she laughed heartily, and exclaimed: "What have I done to you, my dear George? I have not seen you for three weeks; and now that I have the good fortune to meet you, you bow to me as if you were saluting the Queen of England. Mademoiselle Mezenc will think that we have quarrelled. No more ceremony, if you please. Or, if you stand upon form, pray present this gentleman."

George presented Coulanges with a bad grace. The doctor was in the seventh heaven.

"Now," resumed Madame Bréhal, deliberately, "please understand that if to-morrow, at noon precisely, you don't come to lunch with me, with Doctor Coulanges, who will excuse this unceremonious invitation, I will never see you again in my life; yes, you understand, to lunch, not to dinner. You know that I do nothing like other women, and besides, I have my reasons for this invitation. I wish to show you some of my domains which you are not acquainted with, my fields—yes, fields—my kiosks, and what is worth a thousand times more, some paintings which Mademoiselle Mezenc is executing. She has promised me to be there, so you cannot refuse. I have spoken; and now, gentlemen, for the present, good-bye." And thereupon the lady of the Avenue de Villiers dismissed the two friends with a queenly gesture.

## V.

THE club where the scene leading to the duel at Gennevilliers had been enacted, was not such a place as the "Union," "the Jockey," and the "Pommcs de Terre," those three leading clubs of Parisian society. Nor was it one of the mock clubs which one can enter as easily as one enters a café, and which are conducted by managers who are simply croupiers. No ; it was the intermediate sort of club, and was governed by a committee who did not admit every one who aspired to membership. Many men of a little standing, who do not dare to present themselves at the "Jockey" or the "Union" for fear of being undeservedly blackballed, fall back upon less aristocratic and less exclusive establishments such as this club, which was certainly one of the most animated, lively, and agreeable of its class. The majority of the members were young ; but there was a sprinkling of men of mature age. Rather heavy play was indulged in as everywhere else, but disagreeable occurrences seldom happened, that is to say, people were rarely discovered cheating, or had their names posted because their losses had not been settled within the regular delay of forty-eight hours.

The members naturally formed two classes : the day loungers, who came to read the newspapers, and those who arrived at the time when the theatres closed and when sedate folks went to bed. Towards midnight, the night-owls assembled about the fire-place in one of the rooms, which then became a centre of information, for each member brought a supply of evening news and some of the latest scandals with him.

Before dinner, the whist-players did not tolerate loud conversation, and chatters then took refuge in the billiard-room where their talk did not disturb any one. This is what George Courtenay and the doctor did when they arrived at the club after leaving the horse show. Although a discussion had commenced between them as they left the Palais de l'Industrie, they had not yet come to an understanding. Madame Bréhal had dismissed them without waiting for an answer, and George wished to refuse her invitation, whereas it was the doctor's desire to accept it. Each supported his opinion with excellent reasons, and neither would yield to the other.

In the billiard-room two players of almost equal skill were playing a game of thirty points up, and there were numerous wagers on either side. The room was spacious and to keep somewhat apart from the others, the two friends installed themselves at the end of the leather-covered settees on which sat several spectators of the game.

"My dear Coulanges," said George, "I know Madame Bréhal, and I am sure that she was jesting. A widow does not give lunches to bachelors."

"Excuse me, my dear Courtenay," responded Coulanges, "but you have often told me that Madame Bréhal did nothing like other people."

"It was precisely for that reason that she thought of playing a joke upon us, something like an April-fool trick."

"I could understand her doing such a thing as regards yourself, as you have known her for a long while—but I don't believe it as regards myself—she saw me for the first time! No! I will never believe it."

"You are free to risk it. But, for my own part, I shall not set my foot inside her house."

"Do you think that I could go without you? What sort of an appearance should I cut with a young widow and a young girl, neither of whom I know?"

"You can make love to both of them," replied George, abruptly.

"I should take care not to behave so ridiculously. There is no likelihood of my pleasing Madame Bréhal, unless it might be as a physician, and I should have scruples about paying foolish compliments to a young girl who must be still weeping for her lover."

"How do you know that she weeps for him? Did you notice that her eyes were red?"

"No, indeed? Her eyes are superb—regular black diamonds. But she is sad, she must be."

"It appears not," retorted Courtenay drily. "She goes to the horse show three weeks after the duel in which Maurice was killed."

"My dear fellow, it is not proved that people in mourning ought not to go to the horse show," said the doctor, smiling, "besides, you forget what Madame Fresnay, her aunt, told you. Mademoiselle Mezenc has undertaken some painting at Madame Bréhal's house, and it was quite natural that she should accompany her protectress. By the way, I am astonished that Saulieu did not think of her before he fought. He was rich enough to leave her a legacy."

"There are a great many things which astonish me," muttered Courtenay.

"That young girl is charming," continued the doctor, warmly. "And if I had not made a vow to remain a bachelor for the rest of my days, I should really think of trying my luck in that quarter; later on of course, when she is consoled or resigned, whatever you call it. But let us go back to the original question. Are you quite determined not to go to Madame Bréhal's?"

"Absolutely."

"Take care. I shall begin to believe that you are annoyed with her owing to our recent nocturnal adventure on the Boulevard Berthier."

"Believe whatever you like."

"Well, before we met her, I told you that I never meddled in what did not concern me. And yet, I may as well acknowledge that I should have liked lunching to-morrow with that charming widow, not only for the pleasure of seeing her, but in view of visiting her grounds."

"Do you think that the table will be laid in the garden?"

"No, not precisely. But you did not hear apparently that she promised to show us her fields, that was the word she used."

"She spoke of kiosks."

"Well, a kiosk in the midst of a field, perhaps in that very enclosure. I should be curious to see it."

"I shouldn't," retorted Courtenay, drily.

The conversation then ceased. Coulanges feared he might wound his friend by saying too much, and yet he did not abandon his idea, for he was tenacious. Just then a doubtful cannon had been made at the billiard table, and the noise of the discussion which followed prevented any further talk between the two friends.

"I tell you, my ball touched the red," cried one of the players, a frequenter of the Bourse who made some thirty thousand francs a year by playing billiards at the club.

"No one saw it," responded his opponent, a young man who had recently arrived from the provinces to spend his patrimony in Paris.

"I appeal to the captain."

"Hum!" muttered the doctor. "So Morgan is here! I didn't see him."

M. de Pontaumur's second in the recent duel now emerged from one of the groups. The captain had seen twenty years' service and several campaigns, and was not of a pleasant disposition. He had bet on the young provincial, yet he did not hesitate to declare that the ball had missed. He even added that a man had no right, in a game like that, to nurse three balls in a corner of the table. His opinion was the general one and the tumult was appeased. However, the appearance of Morgan, the friend of Maurice's murderer, had not improved Courtenay's temper.

"I say," suddenly said the doctor, turning to him. "Madame Bréhal has some chambermaids, of course?"

"Still Madame Bréhal!" exclaimed George. "And what does it matter to you if she has any maids?"

"Why, if one of them were young and pretty——"

"They are all so. Well?"

"Then one of them probably has a lover."

"What are you driving at?"

"Why, nothing would prevent one of Madame Bréhal's maids from making an appointment in the enclosure which belongs to her mistress——"

"Upon my word you never give in. If you want to go there to-morrow, go without me."

"You know very well that that is impossible," sighed Coulanges.

"Well, I hope you will invent some polite excuse to explain our absence."

"I shall invent nothing at all, for I shall not even write to Madame Bréhal."

"But that will be outrageous rudeness!"

"I don't see it. I am bound to reply to a letter, but when I am invited personally, and no trouble is taken to wait for my answer, I have a right to pay no attention to the invitation. You can write if you like, I certainly sha'n't."

Upon this decision, which seemed without appeal, Courtenay rose up and moved towards a little parlour next the billiard-room. The proximity of Captain Morgan was distasteful to him, and he wished to smoke his cigar in a place where he could no longer see the captain's unpleasant face. Coulanges followed him, not considering himself beaten yet.

In this adjoining apartment they found two members of the club who were talking in the embrasure of a window, and who did not cease chatting when they saw the two friends install themselves on a sofa quite near them. Courtenay and Coulanges knew that one of them was a painter and the other an architect, and they were not surprised to hear them speaking of artistic matters.

"My picture is accepted," said the painter, "and I am going to allow myself a two months' holiday. After the opening of the Salon I shall join some friends at Barbizon. Will you come with me?"

"I wish I could," responded the architect; "I haven't yet finished my work in the Avenue de Villiers, at Madame Bréhal's, a millionaire widow, and a beautiful woman to boot."

"Oh! I know her by sight," said the painter. "She was pointed out to me, last Tuesday, in a box at the Français, and she really is charming. A face like those which Fragonard used to paint, and like nobody paints now-a-days. If she wants her portrait painted at a fair price remember your friend. And what are you building for this Dubarry of the Avenue de Villiers? I thought that she owned a house and lived in it."

"So she does," responded the architect; "it is just at the corner of the avenue and the Boulevard Berthier, which runs past the fortifications."

"That is rather far off; but when a woman has her own horses and carriages, she can put up with the inconvenience of living two or three miles from the opera-house. She is rich, eh?"

"Very rich, and very liberal, which, with a woman born and married in financial circles, seldom happens. The builder's accounts are settled without the least difficulty, and I even think she doesn't find them large enough."

"You must introduce me to her."

"And with all that, she isn't at all narrow-minded. She is gifted with a deal of taste and a highly-developed artistic feeling. I have only to carry out her ideas, and she has three or four a day."

"Why, this lady is a phenomenon, then! For my part I never met such a person. She must be unique. But what work has she confided to you?"

"Nothing of great importance, but it amuses me; it is the most original thing imaginable. Fancy, my dear fellow, Madame Bréhal has had the idea of utilising a large piece of ground which she owns and which adjoins the garden of her house?"

Courtenay was about to rise up to escape a conversation which troubled him, since it had for its object a person whom he wished to forget, but Coulanges, divining his intention, nudged him and whispered: "Wait a bit! This is becoming very interesting."

Accordingly Courtenay stayed on, munching his cigar, which he had allowed to go out.

"It is a praiseworthy idea of hers," continued the architect, "for she might have sold this ground for a large sum. But Madame Bréhal delights in planning, and she dreams of arranging for herself a residence such as nobody else possesses in Paris. She has commenced by transforming the ground in question into a park, a park like that of the Little Trianon at Versailles."

"Well, you are not a landscape gardener?"

"No, but there are buildings there; a cow-house, a dairy, and an aviary, the plans of which I designed, though they were a little bit out of my line. However, the chief thing is the pavilion, which is built from my design with the lady's suggestions."

"A chalet like those one sees in Switzerland, eh? I can't compliment you in that case."

"It would be more correct to say a kiosk; and yet it isn't precisely a kiosk, as we French understand it. People fancy that Turkish kiosks are built of wood, confounding the Sultan's dominions with China. Well, Madame Bréhal desired to have an exact counterpart of a kiosk which the Sultan possesses upon the Bosphorus, and in which the Renaissance and Oriental styles are very happily blended. I merely had to copy it. It will be a little smaller than the original; still it will be charming."

"Only the Bosphorus will be missing. However, if it is built of stone——"

"Of marble, white marble. It does not suit our rainy climate very well, but Madame Bréhal doesn't allow anybody to discuss her fancies."

"She can have her kiosk cleaned every year. But what is she going to use it for?"

"For a change of air, so she pretends. Her house is superb, and the garden surrounding it isn't bad, but she has no country place nor any villa in the suburbs, and she doesn't wait one. She adores Paris to such a point that she never willingly leaves it, even during the summer. So she has thought of bringing the country to her own door, and whenever she feels bored at home or finds it too warm she will go to breathe the air on the other side of her wall."



Courtenay did not lose a word of this instructive conversation, and Coulanges, who was also listening with marked attention, whispered to his friend: "I should like to ask him if there is a door between the garden of the house and this Little Trianon."

George merely responded with a significant glance, and the doctor immediately resumed the nonchalant position of a man who is half asleep, and who does not bother himself about what others are saying. The talkers, moreover, had no motive for circumspection, for they were not speaking of anything secret, and, moreover, they did not even suspect that either of the gentlemen near them knew the lady and the house.

"And how is this work progressing?" now asked the artist.

"It is almost finished. I have only to superintend the interior decorations."

"I am astonished that I have heard nothing of this in society or here at the club. Madame Bréhal is well known in Paris, and her idea isn't a common one by any means."

"She asked me not to say anything of it, and I am not even sure if her servants know of it. The grounds extend to the Rue de Courcelles, and my workmen enter on that side."

"More and more curious," now whispered Coulanges.

And assuredly George shared his opinion, although he appeared to be half asleep.

"She wishes it to be a surprise," continued the architect.

"To whom? To her husband?"

"No. I told you that she was a widow. To her friends, probably."

"I should like to be one of them. But how was it that you did not think of me for the decorations? There must be some paintings."

"Certainly. Four panels in the kiosk, representing the four seasons. I did speak of you. Moreover, the lady saw two of your paintings at the Salon, and she admires your talent."

"Well?"

"But—there is a but—she is the protectress of a young girl who paints, and as she wishes her to make some money——"

"What! a *paintress* to smear the walls of the Sultan's kiosk! And you dare to say that Madame Bréhal is a woman of taste? Capdenac, my friend, you have lowered yourself considerably in my esteem. Don't let us talk any more of this. We had better go and play a game of piquet."

"Be easy, Tartas; I will recommend you for the portrait. Meanwhile, I will try to beat you at piquet, at five sous a point. What do you say? Is that high enough? You may, perhaps, lose a dozen louis, but you can tack them on to the price of the picture."

The two gentlemen now turned and entered the billiard room, pushing the door to behind them.

"Well!" exclaimed the doctor, "do you still say that Madame Bréhal's kind invitation is an April-fool joke? Those kiosks and

the other marvels which she wished to show us exist. And the lunch is explained: at this season of the year it is dark at dinner-time, and we should have seen nothing."

"Not even Mademoiselle Mezenec's pictures," retorted George, with a pre-occupied air.

"Whereas in the day-time we could admire them at our ease, and I admit that I should like to do so. That young girl interests me, and she certainly interests you also."

"Much less than she used to—that is since she placed herself under Madame Bréhal's protection. She needs no one else now."

"That is no reason why poor Saulieu's friends should abstain from giving her marks of their sympathy, and since Madame Bréhal has invited us it would be very bad taste for us to refuse. Remember, too, that we should be able to visit that mysterious enclosure, which puzzled us so much on a certain evening——"

"I have already asked you, doctor, not to remind me of a circumstance which I wish to think no more about—no more than I do of the duel."

"I, also, should like to forget the duel, but I everywhere meet people who remind me of it. We only just saw one of Monsieur de Pontaurmur's seconds, and, look! there is the other one in the red room, you can see through the glass door."

"Corléon!" exclaimed George. "Yes, it is indeed he. I haven't seen him since the day of the duel, and I didn't wish to see him again."

"I have already met him once, to-day," said the doctor, "and I confess that I am not very sorry to see him here again."

"You astonish me! This man inspires me with absolute repugnance."

"Do you think I like him? No, no! I dislike him as much as you do, but to-day I have special reasons for not being annoyed by his presence. I may perhaps even speak to him, if I find the opportunity."

"Great good may it do you! I shall not take part in your conversation, and I should be very seriously annoyed if we have to dine with him. Are you sure that his name was not down for the table d'hôte?"

"Yes, perfectly; but, while I was writing ours, I saw the names of the two gentlemen who were talking here just now, Monsieur Capdenac and Monsieur Tartas."

"Oh! I don't mind them."

"Nor I, either. They are pleasant enough, whereas bores preponderate here. I would rather have them next to me at table than many people of my acquaintance. And then the subject of their conversation isn't exhausted. They have told us many curious things, and they will, perhaps, tell us many others."

"My dear doctor," said Courtenay, quickly, "I do not at all care to hear any more, and I hope that at table these gentlemen will

have sense enough not to babble about Madame Bréhal and her fanciful constructions ; it would be in the worst possible taste."

"Especially as Madame Bréhal requested her architect to observe secrecy. He himself said so. However, the prohibition will soon be raised, as the work is finished. She apparently does not intend to reserve that delicious kiosk for her personal use, to the exclusion of her friends ; and as she has a number——"

"She has very few, on the contrary."

"Well, you are one of them, at all events, and she certainly doesn't lose any time about showing you the wonders of her domain. She is probably very anxious to do so."

"It would have been much better if she had told me of all this before she undertook it ; as it is, she did not say a word to me about it."

"She was arranging a surprise for you, and the lunch to-morrow has no other end in view. I feel very much flattered that she asked me, for, before going to the horse show, I had never seen her. Had you ever spoken about me to her ?"

"I mentioned your name on the evening you came to see me at her house."

"And, perhaps, you also told her that I had served with you as one of poor Saulieu's seconds ?"

"Yes. I had to explain to her why you were in such a hurry to speak to me."

"Then, I am less surprised at being asked. She wishes to thank me in this way for having helped you on a sad occasion."

"I don't know what she wishes ; perhaps she herself doesn't know, for she doesn't reflect much about what she does. However, she may have thought of presenting you to Mademoiselle Mezene to replace the lover whom the latter has lost."

"If I thought that, I should run away," said Coulanges, laughing. "Single blessedness is dear to me, and the woman who will marry me is not born yet. I don't intend to marry before I am fifty, and when I am of that age I shall only care for buds. Still, I am quite sure that you are mistaken. In the first place, Madame Bréhal simply said that we should see the young lady working at her paintings. She did not say that she would lunch with us."

"Why, they are always together ; you heard what Madame Fresnay said. I would willingly bet that Madame Bréhal has taken it into her head to find a husband for Mademoiselle Mezenc, and it seems to me that the latter lends herself to the scheme very willingly. Between ourselves, it is ridiculous enough, for they scarcely knew each other before Maurice's death, and when Madame Bréhal let me know of her intentions in regard to Mademoiselle Mezenc, I did not hide my ideas on the subject from her. If I accepted her invitation, she would think that I had changed my opinion."

"Then it is decided," said the doctor, in a melancholy voice. "We shall not contemplate the marvels of the 'Little Trianon.'"

"I do not prevent you from contemplating them."

"Without you? Never! And it is a pity, for I should like to see the interior of that enclosure. But, after all, I can give myself that pleasure without entering the place. The hillock, at the foot of which I was seated, overlooks the spot which Madame Bréhal has transformed into a paradise, and it would suffice to mount it to obtain a full view."

"That is a very brilliant idea, and if Madame Bréhal perceived you perched upon that hillock, she would conceive a high opinion of you."

Coulanges felt the irony of this speech and said no more. He was almost ashamed of having said so much, and he was amazed at the change that had come over him during the last few hours. He, the careless sceptic; he, who would not have walked a mile to declare his love to the prettiest woman in Paris; he, who pretended that he was indifferent to everything in this mundane sphere, was now racking his brain to solve problems which did not personally affect him, and trying to follow clues like a professional detective.

The wooden bullet picked up after the duel, the screw which had scratched Delphine's hand, all these indications of a crime seemed to him to have a mysterious connection with the singular actions of Maurice Saulieu's adversary. He had already given twenty-five louis to prevent M. Corléon from purchasing a ridiculous piece of furniture, and he had indulged in this costly fancy because he imagined, without knowing why, that the chiffonier also had played a part in the shadowy machinations around him. The case had this peculiarity about it: he was not at all determined to carry the investigation to the end. On the contrary, he was inclined to keep himself clear of it, for fear of becoming involved in a series of difficulties and worries which would trouble his peaceful, philosophical life. And yet in vain did he reproach himself with his weakness, the enigma ever returned to his mind, it absolutely besieged him, and, as all enigmas are made to be solved, he became a private detective in spite of himself.

To complete his bad luck, he could scarcely confide his doubts and troubles to George Courtenay, for he suspected him of being much more interested in Madame Bréhal than he admitted, and he feared he might wound him by investigating the nature of the secret relations which Madame Bréhal appeared to have with M. de Pontaumur. For a moment he had hoped that the lunch in the Avenue de Villiers would furnish him with some light; but George refused to go, and the disappointed doctor no longer knew what to do or even what to say.

A waiter momentarily relieved him from his embarrassment by announcing that dinner was served.

Courtenay, whom many successive incidents had greatly agitated, was only too glad for a change, and Coulanges followed him into the dining-room, where was served the table d'hôte, for which it was

necessary to engage one's place in advance. The negligent or the belated were served in a neighbouring gallery.

The gamblers had thrown down their cards at the first announcement of dinner, and the table was almost fully occupied when the doctor and his friend entered the room. They were enabled, however, to find two seats together, and Coulanges discovered that he had for a neighbour the architect, Capdenac, beyond whom sat the painter, Tartas ; moreover, they both seemed inclined to talk. Courtenay, on his side, was seated on the right hand of a respectable landowner, who had come from the country to obtain some information as to raising live-stock. The other guests almost all belonged to that category of economical club-men, who prefer a dinner at a fixed price to the more varied, but more costly repasts of the fashionable restaurants. These latter, moreover, always complain, and would like to have truffled turkeys and Château Lafitte given them for their seven francs.

The meal was much the same as at all clubs, where similar dishes are served day after day, the luxurious character of the service failing to compensate one for the monotony of the cuisine. The doctor was often afflicted by the latter, but this evening he scarcely paid any attention to what he was eating, and Courtenay still less, although he was accustomed to live well. The other guests were more particular, and the reading of the menu prompted general complaints.

"Salmon again!" cried an old merchant, who had made a fortune in drugs, and who was content with very meagre fare when he dined at home. "It is outrageous to have to keep on eating the same fish."

"Especially salmon," said a gentleman with a white cravat and gold spectacles, looking like Henri Monnier's Monsieur Prud'homme. "One gets tired of it so quickly that in Scotland, where it is very common, the servants——"

"Stipulate that they shall only eat it three times a week. Everybody knows that," interrupted a facetious stockbroker. "But we are not in Scotland, and here and at Ledoyen's in the Champs-Élysées, people eat it three hundred and sixty-five times a year."

"Well," observed Tartas, gravely, "folks at least have one day's rest when it is leap year."

"All this, gentlemen, is the fault of the dinner committee," said a young swell who was in a bad humour. "Monsieur Corléon is a member of it, and he doesn't inspire me with confidence."

"Do you think that he has an understanding with the tradespeople?" asked Capdenac, laughing.

"I know nothing about it ; but since he has been on the committee, everything has been execrable, especially the wines."

"Send in a complaint, my dear fellow, and supply proofs. However, Corléon is going to drink some of his own wines, since he dines here this evening."

Courtenay glanced at the doctor, who said to him in a low voice: "The fellow must have written his name down at the last moment." As he spoke, Monsieur Corléon entered the dining-room, and sat down nearly opposite to them. His arrival checked the general mirth. He was not liked at the club, perhaps because he always won at play; however, he was too prudent to give people a chance to quarrel with him.

Courtenay was enraged, and could scarcely abstain from leaving the room; however, his better reason prevailed, and he sat still, though, at the same time, he made up his mind never to dine at the table d'hôte again. Coulanges did not much regret being there. Corléon figured in the problem he was studying, and he vaguely hoped that the conversation about to ensue would furnish him with some unexpected indications. He had not long to wait.

"I say, Corléon," exclaimed the young speculator, whom Captain Morgan had accused of nursing his balls at billiards, "are you refurnishing your rooms? I saw you to-day at the auction-rooms, ardently bidding for an ebony chiffonier."

"You are mistaken, my dear Verville," quickly responded Monsieur Corléon, with a glance at the doctor. "I did not bid for anything."

"Pooh! you'll tell me perhaps that I did not see you. You were hidden behind Salomon, but I have good eyes."

"An old Jew, very badly dressed, eh? It was he who bid."

"On your account, though. You whispered the bids to him, and he repeated them."

"I tell you that you are mistaken. I went in there by chance, and did not even notice what they were selling."

"Well, it was lucky you did not get the chiffonier, at all events. It wasn't worth three louis, and it was knocked down at a senseless price. Ask Doctor Coulanges, who bid against you."

Coulanges could well have dispensed with this appeal, which he had not foreseen. He had indeed perceived Verville in the auction-room, but this gentleman, with whom he had but a slight acquaintance, had merely been visible for an instant, and the doctor had flattered himself that his bids had not attracted his attention. However, he felt obliged to answer: "I beg of you to believe that I didn't buy the chiffonier for myself, for I am quite of your opinion; the price was too high."

"It appears that no one wanted it, and that it was sold all by itself," said Verville, laughing. "You do right to deny it, gentlemen, for it was a horribly ugly thing."

"That is what I said over and over again to the lady I bought it for, and who begged me to bid for her."

"Little Delphine, of the Bouffes, eh? I noticed her, and I said to myself, 'It isn't possible that the doctor has taken a fancy to such an object as that! Well, well, all is explained. That little girl is as pretty as a pink, but she has a false idea of the value of furniture.'"

"It was, perhaps, her mother's chiffonier—a family relic," said the facetious painter.

"Perhaps it was," rejoined Verville, gravely. "And perhaps Corléon intended to offer it to her."

"In that case, I should have paid for it," responded Corléon, "and if you wish for any information on that point, you have only to question the auctioneer."

"It would be simpler to question the doctor, but that would be indiscreet."

"Oh! not at all," replied Coulanges. "I very willingly confess that I bought the article for Madame du Raincy, who is one of my patients. I went to the Hôtel Drouot to get a little picture of Clouet's, which pleased me very much; but I missed it, and then I met Delphine, who begged me to buy her something; indeed, she begged me so prettily that I let myself be talked over. I do not regret my money, but I regret that she had such bad taste."

"Those girls are all alike; they have no idea of art. I'll bet that she would have turned up her nose at your Clouet, whereas she is delighted with her trumpery chiffonier."

Coulanges simply smiled in token of assent. He did not care to prolong this conversation, in which, however, he was not sorry to have taken part, for M. Corléon, after exhibiting a certain amount of uneasiness, now appeared quite reassured.

"He thinks that I was the dupe of his denials," thought the doctor; "that is just what I wanted; and now I am positive. By denying that he bid for the chiffonier, he has proved to me that he had some reason for concealing that he wanted it."

The other diners, who had taken very little interest in this conversation, drifted on to other subjects, and the repast went on. People eat quickly at these club dinners, and one soon reaches the second course.

Courtenay, still sombre and pre-occupied, had paid no attention to the remarks of his companions. He was thinking of Madame Bréhal, and, after scouting the idea of accepting her invitation to lunch, he was now wondering if it would not be better for him to go. The chatter of Capdenac, the architect, had somewhat shaken his earlier resolution. Since the evening which had ended so badly in the Avenue Berthier, Courtenay had realised that he was absolutely jealous, and he knew very well that a man is never jealous unless he loves. He would not acknowledge it to himself, but he missed Madame Bréhal. He had abstained from going to her house, because he feared that his feelings might again lead him away. He was afraid to resume the interview at the dangerous point at which it had been broken off, and to finish the declaration which he had begun in the little drawing-room, when he had almost fallen at the feet of the beautiful widow.

He had hoped, though, that she would call or write, whereas she had not given him any sign of life. This indifference wounded him,

for Madame Bréhal had not accustomed him to such coldness, and he could find only disagreeable explanations of it. Monsieur de Pontaumur never left his mind ; and, as often happens in such cases, he shrunk from a solution of the mystery, which, perhaps, it only depended upon himself to obtain. Nothing surely prevented him from telling Madame Bréhal what he had seen, and it was not probable that she would take refuge in silence. However, his self-love restrained him ; he knew that to speak would be to acknowledge what he felt, and so he waited for some more fitting opportunity.

He had indirectly learnt that Mademoiselle Mezenc had agreed to paint the pictures ordered by Madame Bréhal, but he had not again been to see Maurice Saulieu's betrothed. The visit he had paid her after the duel had left a painful impression upon him. But now, in the very midst of his uncertainty, he had suddenly met the young girl with Madame Bréhal, and then, without excuses or preambles, the lady of the Avenue de Villiers had given him a most unexpected invitation. What was the meaning of this lunch, to which she had also invited the doctor ? Why did she wish to bring Maurice's two friends together at her house ? Was it really to show them her gardens and kiosks, or had she more serious designs ? Courtenay kept asking himself these questions, more especially since he had accidentally heard of the transformation of her domain.

While he was reflecting and absently eating what the waiters placed before him, the name of the man he most detested in the world fell upon his ear. The speculator, Vervelle, an incessant talker, was asking Corléon for news of Monsieur de Pontaumur, whom no one had seen for three weeks. It did not show very good taste on his part to make such a request, in presence of Saulieu's seconds, but in Paris the dead die quickly, and the duel was well-nigh forgotten. Courtenay and the doctor simply exchanged a look, and listened without saying a word. They noticed that M. Corléon answered as if against his will, and tried to turn the conversation into another channel. This was meritorious on his part, and they were tempted to give him credit for it ; however, the indiscreet Vervelle insisted so much, that other guests finally broke in.

"Monsieur de Pontaumur seems to be seeking solitude," said Madame Bréhal's architect. "I have met him two or three times near the fortifications."

"Bah !" cried Vervelle. "And what the devil was he doing there ?"

"He was meditating. I saw him in broad daylight, seated on the top of a hillock."

"And didn't you ask him why he was there ?"

"No. I scarcely know him. And, besides, I saw him from a distance. I thought that he was admiring the view. From that part you can see the new district which has been built at the end of the Avenue de Villiers ; there are some superb houses and beautiful gardens."



"Dear me ; but I say, Corléon, is your friend in love ? Only lovers go to meditate in solitary places. From Pontaumur's appearance, I should never have suspected that he had any heart troubles."

The doctor was upon thorns, and Courtenay, pale with anger, could scarcely contain himself. The architect, who was not lacking in tact, ended by perceiving his neighbour's worry, and took no further notice of Vervelle's foolish words. Some of the diners, well-bred men, who had not yet forgotten the sad story of the duel, raised their voices to discuss another subject, and at last there was no more question of M. de Pontaumur.

But the blow had been struck, and George had taken a decided resolution. He let Coulanges engage his neighbour in a colloquy, which had no other object than to prevent him from reverting to the disagreeable subject, and finally, when the doctor turned towards him again, he said in a low voice : "A stop must be put to all this at once, or else that scoundrel would end by compromising Madame Bréhal."

"I always thought that that was what he wanted," returned Coulanges."

"At all events, I wish her to be warned."

"How ? Do you propose writing to her ?"

"No. Such things cannot be written. I shall speak to her. I have changed my opinion. We will lunch with her to-morrow."

"Good ! I shall do so very willingly, and I promise that I won't put myself in your way. I have a presentiment, my dear fellow, that you won't regret going. Everything will be cleared up."

## VI.

It was over—that lunch—at which Courtenay had only consented to appear after long hesitation, and which the doctor would have regretted all his life, had he been obliged to decline the invitation to please his friend. He had never before found himself seated near so charming a woman, he had never partaken of such exquisite viands or drunk such good wines, though he knew and frequented all the restaurants renowned for their cellars. It was no longer a mere liking that he felt for Madame Bréhal, he regarded her with veneration, since he had discovered that she could distinguish a fine wine from an ordinary one and appreciate it, which is still more rare. Coulanges professed the opinion that nature had refused gastronomical instincts to the weaker sex, and that therein lay the cause of all women's inferiority.

Madame Bréhal, however, was perfect ; and the doctor, grateful for having been so well treated, would willingly have raised an altar, as a thank-offering, in the midst of these famous grounds, which he hoped to visit before taking leave. Not a word had as yet been said of the marvels celebrated by the architect, Capdenac, and they were now at the coffee, which was served in a little nook adjoining the dining-room, and furnished in an original manner, with black silk hangings, and large divans of the same stuff, and lighted by stained glass windows. They had chatted about the new plays, the races, the toilets displayed on the previous Tuesday at the Théâtre Français, the last Academy elections, and even of Monsieur Pasteur's discoveries ; in fact, of everything excepting the one subject, which would have specially interested George Courtenay and Charles Coulanges.

Madame Bréhal had received them with a familiar cordiality which had astonished them both. The doctor had expected some of those polite phrases which are the usual preliminaries of acquaintance, but the lady had simply held out her hand to him, thanking him for having come, as if she had known him for years.

George had expected some friendly reproaches, and even discreet explanations. It would have been quite natural for her to tell him why she no longer stopped her carriage before his house in the Rue de Milan, and to ask why he had not come to see her for nearly a month, when he had formerly come three or four times a week. But there had been nothing of all this. Madame Bréhal received him as if they had not ceased seeing each other every day ; not a reproachful word, not a question ; and what surprised him

even more, not even the shadow of an allusion to the duel or to Mademoiselle Mezenc.

George had thought that the latter would appear at the repast, but Madame Bréhal did not seem to remember that on the previous day she had told the gentlemen that they would meet Mademoiselle Mezenc at her house. When one of them tried to lead the conversation toward less general subjects, she gaily, but obstinately, eluded the snare. She even launched into a learned discussion with the doctor upon the comparative merits of Burgundy and Bordeaux wines—a subject which was amusing enough for the doctor. However, George became very impatient. He was beginning to think that the lunch was a mystification, and he made up his mind not to leave without speaking to Madame Bréhal of M. de Pontaumur's conduct. However, he could not decently broach this grave question before the doctor, and he waited for an opportunity for a *tête-à-tête*. Would this walk through her grounds take place? He almost doubted it, and yet he noticed the absence of the cigars which Madame Bréhal never failed to offer her guests when she gave a dinner. Usually, on rising from table, the men passed into a smoking-room, where the best Havana brands were set out; however, that day, Madame Bréhal had conducted them into a nook far too small to permit them to light cigars.

Coulanges also regretted being deprived of one of his favourite pleasures, and did not understand how so intelligent a woman could forget that cigars are the indispensable accompaniments of coffee. However, she finally enlightened him. He had just emptied his cup and placed it, with a sigh, upon the massive silver salver, when she said to him with a smile: "I know what you want, gentlemen; but I don't want to leave you and I can only endure tobacco in the open air. The time has come to give you the surprise which I have arranged for you, and if you will follow me, you can smoke at your ease. You will find some cigars in the gallery, through which we shall have to pass on our way to the garden."

"Is this surprise in the garden, then?" asked George.

"You shall see," responded Madame Bréhal, gaily. "All roads lead to Rome," and she rose with a grace which delighted the doctor. He had various theories upon the movements of women; he claimed that they had ten different ways of rising up, sitting down, walking, and wearing their dresses. And he found Madame Bréhal adorable in her flowered silk dress, covered with cascades of lace, and her little slippers, above which one caught sight of a strip of black silk stocking embroidered with red butterflies.

At the end of the gallery, and while the gentlemen were choosing their cigars, she donned a hat, which completed the conquest of Coulanges—a gem of a hat, edged with rose-coloured silk, covered with white lace and adorned with a garland of rosebuds. She then provided herself with a Chinese umbrella, round and flat, like a circular fan, the last "fad" of the day, and she stepped on to the

straight and sandy path which traversed the grounds in all their length, passing under a continuous arch of foliage. The doctor was so delighted in watching her that he remained a little behind, the better to admire her, exactly as one places one's self at a distance the better to judge of a horse's points. At this moment he scarcely thought of M. de Pontaurmur. However, George was thinking of that disagreeable personage, and he took advantage of the occasion to speak. "Do you know that I did not wish to come," he said to Madame Bréhal in a low voice, "and that I now regret having done so? I thought that, like me, you would feel the necessity of an explanation after a month's silence."

"And till now we have only spoken of insignificant things," interrupted Madame Bréhal. "Have no fear, my friend, you won't lose anything for having waited."

"Then why did you invite my friend Coulanges?"

"For various reasons, the first of which is that I feared being alone with you. We parted, one evening, just as we were both beginning to lose our heads."

"The scene to which you allude shall not be renewed, I promise you."

"You are sure of yourself, it seems, but I am not so sure of myself, and as I desired a serious talk with you, I wished the interview to take place in the open air," replied Madame Bréhal, laughing.

"What have you to say to me?"

"You shall soon know, but let Monsieur Coulanges join us."

The doctor now hastened forward, and went into ecstasies over the beauty of the trees, since he could not decently express what he thought of the beauty of his hostess.

"Yes, I am very fond of walking here," said Madame Bréhal. "It is like being in the country. I have arranged, by the way, a sort of country house, and that is what I am going to show you."

"The surprise?" asked Courtenay.

"A surprise which is not entirely one, for I spoke a little too much of it yesterday. But you can scarcely divine what you are going to see. I have been committing follies."

"Supposing I told you that I know what follies they are?" murmured Courtenay.

"You would astonish me considerably. My people themselves know absolutely nothing."

"What! they have never entered the enclosure which you are transforming?"

"Never! Mademoiselle Mezenc alone has the right to enter it, and we shall now find her there. I hoped that she would lunch with us, but she refused. I regretted it very much, for she is charming. Don't you think so?"

This last question was addressed to the doctor, who responded by eulogising the perfections of the young girl whom he had seen for the first time on the day before.

"To know her is to love her," resumed Madame Bréhal, "and I have become more and more attached to her. But you can't guess where I am taking you, my dear George! I feel sure that you have never noticed that door, below there, at the end of the path, in the middle of the wall covered with ivy."

"No, never," replied George, exchanging a look with Coulanges. It was about twenty paces before them, and evidently communicated with the grounds which Monsieur de Pontaurmur had entered from the Boulevard Berthier. He could, therefore, have passed through this doorway, and have entered the garden of the house.

"I alone have the key," now said Madame Bréhal.

"I cannot understand why I have never noticed it before," remarked Courtenay with intention. "It seems to me that I have already gone along this path as far as the wall."

"You are not mistaken," replied Madame Bréhal. "You have often walked here with me. But the door was hidden by some thick ivy, and, to discover it, you would have had to know it was there. I scarcely knew it myself."

"Then you never used it?"

"No, never; that is, before I undertook to transform the enclosure. Why should I have gone into a field where there were neither flowers nor trees? I fancy, besides, that the door would have been very difficult to open. The lock and hinges were horribly rusty."

"But they are so no longer, I hope, for the sake of your delicate hands."

"No, no, my architect sent a man who put everything in order."

"When was that?"

"Why, nearly a month ago, when the work in the enclosure was sufficiently advanced for me to take pleasure in visiting it."

"A month ago!" repeated Courtenay. "That is singular."

"What is singular? You haven't been in my garden for months past. Our walks naturally ceased during the winter, so you could not have perceived a change. And really, my dear George, one would say that you suspected that a crime had been committed here. You question me with as much persistence as if you were a magistrate." And as George protested by a gesture, she continued, laughing gaily: "Did you imagine, by chance, that some fine cavaliers took this road to have secret interviews with me? That would be very romantic, I allow, but if I loved any one I should like him to come here by the grand entrance. I hide neither my feelings nor my actions, and I have always shown my preferences; you are not ignorant of that, although you seem to have forgotten it."

The opportunity was a good one to speak of M. de Pontaurmur's nocturnal manoeuvres, but the doctor was there, and Madame Bréhal had promised George a private interview. So he remained silent, and Coulanges hastened to say: "Courtenay thinks, madame, that the door might serve a burglar's purpose,"

"Then he would require the key, and I have never confided mine to any one, except to Mademoiselle Mezenc, who assuredly has not made any bad use of it. It is the easiest way, at present, to enter the enclosure. I told you, I think, that there is an entrance in the Rue de Courcelles. However, that is guarded by a porter, whom I installed there some days ago."

"A man you can trust, I suppose?" said George.

"Entirely. Madame Mezenc recommended him to me on the day I went to her house to ask her to allow her charming daughter to work for me; so there is no danger on that side. However, my grounds are only separated from the Boulevard Berthier by some palings, high enough and strong enough, it is true, still an agile thief could scale them; but, after all, he would find nothing to steal, for the pavilion I have built is not yet furnished, and I would defy any one to climb over the wall before us; it is twenty feet high, and, as you see, it is spiked with iron on the top. Besides, I am going to build a similar wall all about my domain. So, you see, gentlemen, my estate will be impregnable."

This conversation had detained Madame Bréhal and her friends for a few minutes under the trees of the pathway. She now walked forward deliberately, towards the door which so engrossed George Courtenay, and, handing him the key, she begged him to open it, which he immediately proceeded to do.

The two friends expected surprises, and they saw at the first glance that Capdenac had not exaggerated this terrestrial Eden. There were emerald grass-plots, tastefully arranged flower-beds, and masses of well-chosen bushes. In the background rose up the Rue de Courcelles buildings, looking like English cottages, all brick and wood, and covered with creepers; while in the centre of the lawn appeared the famous white marble kiosk, which, nondescript as it was, had a charming effect amid the verdure around. There was only one storey above the ground floor, but it was covered with ornamentation, carved pillars, volutes and plinths, arabesqued balustrades, and round and oval windows placed as if haphazard. The whole was imposing, and four flights of marble steps, one on each side, gave this pseudo-Oriental construction a character quite its own.

"What do you think of my fancy?" asked Madame Bréhal. "For it is my fancy; all the ideas were my own, and if you knew how much trouble I had in persuading the architect to execute them you would admire my strength of will."

"It is wonderful!" exclaimed the doctor, enthusiastically.

"The garden is well laid out, and the pavilion is very original," said George, more calmly.

"Unfortunately, the interior decorations are not finished, but you can, at least, judge of what they will be. The room where Mademoiselle Mezenc works is almost ready; it only needs the completion of the paintings which she began scarcely two weeks ago."

"Do you think her capable of finishing them?"

"Certainly. Why do you ask that?"

"Oh—because, if you take her every day to the horse-show or some other place of amusement, she will have little time for painting."

"That has only happened once. Do you find anything wrong in it?"

"I have no right to criticise Mademoiselle Mezeno's conduct, still I was a little surprised to meet her in the midst of that fashionable crowd, but a few weeks after the death of the man whom she was on the point of marrying."

"I alone am guilty. She did not wish to go, but I dragged her there almost by force. If I thought myself obliged to justify my conduct to you, my friend, I should limit myself to recalling to your mind what I said to you on the evening of that unfortunate duel. In memory of Monsieur Saulieu, who was your friend, I promised to discharge for this young girl the duties which had hitherto fallen to her aunt, Madame Fresnay."

"And you have succeeded very quickly; Madame Fresnay complains most bitterly of you."

"Have you seen her?"

"Yes, I met her yesterday at the Palais de l'Industrie. She costed me, and I was obliged to submit to the honour she did me; she said all the evil she could of her niece."

"And no good of me, I suppose?"

"She asserted that you wished to find a husband for Mademoiselle Mezeno."

"She is right. I should be very glad to find Marianne a husband worthy of her. But I am in despair. She does not help me at all. I have tried in vain to entertain her, but her sadness does not leave her. I confess, gentlemen, that I rely upon you to brighten her up a little this afternoon."

"I beg to be excused," exclaimed Courtenay.

"Very well; however, Monsieur Coulanges will not retreat, I am sure of it, and I know by experience that he is the wittiest and most amiable of companions. I won't say to you that, if it had not been for him, our lunch would have been a very melancholy affair, but—"

"You content yourself with thinking so."

"Perhaps I do; and I will not conceal that there are a great many things for which you need to be forgiven. Is it not so, sir?" she added, addressing the doctor. "You will be attentive to my protégée, will you not?"

"It won't be a hard or an unpleasant task. She is bewitching," replied Coulanges, with a warmth which was of good augury.

"Bewitching is the word. It suffices to know her to become attached to her. I don't speak of her beauty, which is apparent to all eyes. Look there, do you see her with her palette in her hand? She looks like the Genius of Painting."

All the windows were open, and, in the bright light of a clear spring afternoon, the young girl's profile was visible, almost as George had seen it in her little studio in the Rue Blanche. Only, she was standing, and her figure, admirably defined by her tight-fitting black dress, stood out sharply against the woodwork.

Madame Bréhal and her friends had walked on while chatting, and they had almost reached the marble steps of the pavilion. At the sound of their voices, Mademoiselle Mezenec turned and came to the window. George felt dazzled; he had never seen her looking so beautiful. As for the doctor, he stood in ecstasy before this virginal figure.

"My dear Marianne, you know these gentlemen," said Madame Bréhal. "Will you permit them to enter? I ask your permission, because, in your capacity as an artist, you would have a perfect right not to allow any one to look at your work before it is finished."

Madame Bréhal smiled as she spoke, and waved her hand to her friend, who answered sweetly: "You know very well, madame, that I have no secrets from you, nor from your friends, and I am always happy to see you."

"Then I will leave you Coulanges, to begin with, and take Monsieur Courtenay to visit my dairy. We will join you again in a few minutes."

Coulanges was delighted with this arrangement. He thought that George and Madame Bréhal wanted to be alone, and for his own part, he asked nothing better than to talk with a pretty woman. He quickly mounted the steps and entered the kiosk, while his friend and his hostess walked away by a side path.

"You told me that you wanted to speak to me seriously," said George to Madame Bréhal, when they were far enough away to be sure that no one could hear them.

"Yes, very seriously, too seriously, perhaps," immediately responded Madame Bréhal. "But you, my friend, haven't you anything to say to me?"

"If I had nothing to say to you," answered Courtenay, "I should not be here, you may well believe."

"That, no doubt, means that you would have refused my invitation?"

"I should have neither refused nor accepted it. I should not have come."

"And why, may I ask you, would you have acted so impolitely towards me?"

"Because I have something to complain of."

"Excuse me, it is I who have something to complain of. Will you explain to me how it happens that you suddenly ceased to come to my house?"

"And will you explain to me why you never deigned to inquire what had become of me?"

"I might reply, that I am a woman, and that it is not my place



to run after you. But we are good comrades, which allows us to depart from conventional rules, and so I will abstain from invoking the privilege of my sex. I prefer to tell you the simple truth, which is, that your last visit troubled me. I do not know any other word to express what I felt. It seemed to me that the nature of our friendly relations was about to change. You see how frank I am—and before proceeding further along on that perilous road, I wished to take time to reflect.”

“Supposing I gave you the same reason to excuse my conduct, what would you say?”

“I should believe you, and I should not blame you. It is a serious matter to replace an old and tried friendship by a livelier and less durable sentiment, even when the two parties are agreed as to the advantages of the change, and I do not know as yet if that is the case. But I may say that I certainly should not have delayed so long in asking you to come, if I had not thought that the death of your friend would give you certain duties to perform——”

“You were mistaken. His provincial relatives took those off my shoulders.”

“I knew that they had taken possession of Monsieur Saulieu’s property. He left no will, then?”

“None has been found.”

“I regret it for Marianne’s sake, for I believe that he intended to leave her his fortune. And that leads me to tell you that I have also been very much occupied about her. It was not without a deal of difficulty that I persuaded her to accept my patronage in society and to execute the work in my pavilion. The negotiations with her and her mother took up all my time. But I have entirely succeeded at last, and I hope that we shall not be separated until she marries. I can, therefore, now think a little of myself, and if I had not met you yesterday at the horse-show, I should have certainly written to you to-day. You cannot say, my dear George, that I was sulky with you, since I was the first to make advances. And, now, it is your turn to confess,” concluded Madame Bréhal, with a smile. “What have you to tell me after this month of absence?”

“That you have broken your word to me,” responded George, bluntly.

“Good heavens! You commence by accusing me of perjury! Where will you end?”

“Don’t jest. It is very serious.”

“What did I swear to you? Deign to recall it to my memory.”

“I demanded no oath of you, you know very well. But you promised me that you would cease to receive Monsieur de Pont-aurur.”

“And I have kept my promise. He presented himself one Wednesday, when there were twenty persons with me, Mademoiselle Mezenc among them. I had foreseen that that might happen, and my people had orders to tell him that I was not at home, which they

did. The affront which he received was known to all my friends ; I explained to them, however, why I did not wish to receive Monsieur de Pontaurmur, since I received Mademoiselle Mezenc, and they all approved of the course I had taken. What more could you exact of me ?”

“Nothing. I have no right to exact anything. But it is my duty to tell you what has happened.”

“You alarm me. I can conceive that Monsieur de Pontaurmur is not very well pleased, but I do not suppose that he has dared to slander me.”

“He does worse. He compromises you.”

“What do you mean ?” exclaimed Madame Bréhal, with a start.

“Why, yesterday at the club, where I dined, your architect related at table, before twenty people, that Monsieur de Pontaurmur passed his time in watching what went on in your house.”

“What ! In my house ? Why, this is folly ? How can he spy upon me in my house ? Does he climb up into the trees of my garden ?”

“No. He contents himself with mounting that hillock which you see from here,” said George, pointing to the embankment of the fortifications, the top of which could be perceived above the fence. “It was there that your architect surprised him in a contemplative posture.”

Madame Bréhal burst into such a frank peal of laughter that George, who was observing her, was tempted to think that his suspicions lacked common-sense.

“Really,” she cried. “Ah ! this is the height of the ridiculous, and I have a deal of difficulty in believing that Monsieur de Pontaurmur has undertaken to play the sentimental lover, in full daylight, before all the passers-by in the avenue. But, at all events, it was not for my sake he perched himself on that observatory, for I spend very little time in my new garden. I go once a day to see Marianne at work, but I don’t stay long, for fear of disturbing her. And now I think of it, she might perceive this man, who is odious to her, and I wish to spare her that annoyance. To-morrow, Monsieur Capdenac shall receive orders to begin building the wall we have agreed upon. I have told you, I think, that this wall will be twenty feet high, and we shall, therefore, be shielded from all indiscreet observers. I wonder, though, for what purpose Monsieur de Pontaurmur indulges in this extravagant conduct. However, if these are the serious things you have to tell me——”

“No ; that is not all.”

“What ! is there something more, then ?” asked Madame Bréhal, now thoroughly roused.

“I am going to be frank, but brutal. I must be so. You must know, then, that on the evening I was here, the evening of the duel, my friend Coulanges, who was waiting for me in a cab in the Avenue de Villiers, saw a man pass whom he thought he recognised, and

whom he followed at a distance. This man turned down the Boulevard Berthier, and on reaching the palings which enclosed these grounds, where we now are, he drew from his pocket a key, with which he opened a gate over there in the corner, and entered——”

“Well! It was no doubt some pupil of my architect’s, or perhaps Monsieur Capdenac himself. I know that he often enters that way, and he had perhaps forgotten something in the pavilion.”

“No; it was Monsieur de Pontaumur.”

“What? Come, your friend surely dreamed that; or he was deceived by a resemblance.”

“He declares that he is sure of the point.”

“But you? Did you also see Monsieur de Pontaumur?”

“No. I waited a certain length of time, and I should have waited until he came out; but Coulanges prevailed on me to go away.”

“And you did not come to warn my people, or to warn me, which would have been even better?”

“I wished to, but Coulanges made objections, to which I yielded.”

“What were they?”

“He represented to me that the man could not be a thief.”

“And he wasn’t one assuredly; for there is nothing to steal in the pavilion—nothing, excepting Mademoiselle Mezenc’s paintings, which are scarcely begun. I repeat, my dear George, that it must have been one of Monsieur Capdenac’s pupils.”

George remained silent, but he gazed fixedly at Madame Bréhal.

“Ah! I understand,” she said, after a pause, in a voice which she vainly endeavoured to steady; “you thought he was my lover. And what a lover! Monsieur de Pontaumur, who killed your friend in a duel, and whom I have forbidden my house! Ah! I confess that I did not expect to be accused by you of such infamy, and if——” At this point she stopped short, and her eyes filled with tears.

“No, I did not accuse you,” cried Courtenay, greatly moved.

“I was revolted by the suspicions which assailed me, and yet I could not succeed in driving them away. If you only knew what I have suffered since that accursed day!”

“And this was the reason you did not come?”

“And I should never have come again, if Capdenac’s imprudent words had not made me fear that reports would be spread about you, reports which it was necessary to stop. I wished to tell you what I knew. I have told you now, but I do not ask any explanations of you.”

“You can ask them, my friend, but I cannot give them to you. How can I explain what I myself do not understand? All that I can think is, that Monsieur de Pontaumur wishes to ruin my reputation.”

“I agree with you, and if you will authorise me to put an end to all this——”

"The remedy would be worse than the evil. The publicity of a quarrel would only serve his purpose. I cannot prevent him from wandering about the streets near my grounds, but I can take proper measures so that he shall not enter them. That gate in the palings shall be condemned this very day. I alone have the key of the garden. I will also tell the porter who guards the entrance in the Rue de Courcelles that a man has entered the enclosure by night, and that he must keep a close watch. I will even place one of my servants in the pavilion, arm him, and order him to fire on any intruder. What more can I do?"

"Nothing," replied George.

Madame Bréhal raised her eyes, still wet with tears, and resumed, with an emotion which she did not seek to hide: "Yes, my friend, I can do even more. There is one means of frustrating the outrageous and ridiculous manœuvres of Monsieur de Pontaurmur, and also of ending a situation which——"

"Take that means, then."

"Will you help me?" asked Madame Bréhal, half smiling; "I cannot employ this means alone. Two are needed to ensure its success."

George turned and looked at Madame Bréhal, who met his gaze frankly. They had arrived near the cottages which limited the grounds on the side of the Rue de Courcelles. These erections, in the English style, were completely finished, but they had not yet been put to the use for which they were destined. The porter's lodge was beyond, and at the spot where they had stopped, no one could hear them. The sky was cloudless, and the air was balmy; it was a day for love and lovers' confidences.

"Yes," continued Madame Bréhal, "two are needed. Alone, I might not prevent that man from pursuing me, for, in acting as he has done, he has had a purpose, and I realise what that purpose is. He wishes to force me to marry him."

"He has every audacity, then," murmured Courtenay.

"Yes. He commenced, as I told you, by being very attentive to me. I could not be offended; he has a name and a position in the world. I even know women among my friends who would have advised me to marry him if I had consulted them, but I took care not to do so. I limited myself to discouraging Monsieur de Pontaurmur, and I did it in such a way that he understood me, and his assiduity ceased. It was then, however, that he no doubt conceived the idea of attaining his ends by scandalous means."

"He acted in the same fashion with Mademoiselle Mezenc."

"Not exactly. He slandered her publicly to revenge himself for her disdain. Marianne has told me all; and since I have known the real cause of that pitiful duel, I have held Monsieur de Pontaurmur in horror. With me, however, he proceeds differently; it isn't my person he covets, but my fortune. He would never have married Mademoiselle Mezenc, who was poor."

"He must have had a very poor opinion of her."

"He has learned to know her. She treated him as he deserved, and you know what a revenge he took. But he doesn't know *me* yet! He hopes to intimidate me. He thinks that by getting my name mixed up with his, he will end by persuading me that he really loves me, and, above all, he hopes that the rumour of his lover-like extravagances will be spread abroad. You have just told me that they have already been remarked. Monsieur Capdenac saw him planted upon an eminence, and contemplating my garden. Monsieur Coulanges saw him entering this enclosure at night."

"Do you think, then, that it was really Pontaumur whom the doctor surprised?"

"I am not sure of it; but I am very much inclined to believe it, since I know what he does by daylight. What his plan is, and how he obtained the key, are mysteries which will, perhaps, be explained later on. What chiefly concerns me now is to put an end to his shameful persecution, and there is but one course for me—to marry. When I am married, Monsieur de Pontaumur will see that he is beaten; or, if by any possibility he continues his plotting, he will find some one to call him to account in the person of my husband. I need a defender."

"Do you think that I am not ready to defend you?"

"I mean an authorised defender. By what title would you undertake my defence now?"

After a short spell of silence, Madame Bréhal continued, in an unsteady voice: "And now, my friend, I come to the difficult part. You have guessed, I am sure, the object of this discourse, and, before you answer, let me tell you how it is I have come to speak to you like this. I have reflected a great deal during the last three weeks, and so have you, I think. Our decision will not be taken lightly. We knew each other well, but we needed to prove our feelings by a separation. The experiment has now been made, and I do not blush to declare that I have suffered from not seeing you. You also have acknowledged that you suffered; you have even shown me that you were jealous."

"Madly jealous," exclaimed George.

"And wrongly so—as you will admit, I hope."

"Yes, we cannot live without one another. If you love me as I love you, there is no reason why we should not be happy for ever."

"Then I permit you to ask for my hand," said Madame Bréhal.

George already held this hand in his, and he raised it to his lips.

"So you no longer suspect me of making secret appointments with Monsieur de Pontaumur?" asked Madame Bréhal, gaily.

"And you no longer suspect me of marrying you for your two hundred thousand francs a year?" retorted George, also laughing.

They were gazing at each other in ecstasy. Madame Bréhal's frankness had cleared up the situation in an instant, just as the first rays of the rising sun dispel the morning mist.

"We shall have cause to bless that horrible Pontaurmur after all," said the young widow, whose eyes were beaming. "If your friend had not seen him slip into my grounds, you would have returned the next day, and we should perhaps never have perceived that we were necessary to one another. It was the separation that enlightened us as to our real feelings. I, at least, knew very well that I loved you, but having only very vague notions as to love—you need not smile—I was only married for six months, you know—!"

"I was not smiling, I assure you," exclaimed George. "How could I smile at an error into which I fell myself? I thought for a long time that I merely felt friendship for you, but on the evening Coulanges told me that a man had entered the place, I knew that I was mistaken, for my heart was devoured with furious jealousy."

"I am a little bit angry with you, not for being jealous, but for being so of a man I despise. However, I forgive you, and all's well that ends well. But Dr. Coulanges must have a singular opinion of me."

"No, for he is convinced that Pontaurmur was going to see one of your maids. He told me so at once."

"I think that he is mistaken. My maids are all well-behaved girls. But I am not sorry that he thought so. I wish I could be useful to him. If he should fall in love with one of my friends, I would plead his cause, I assure you; and, by the way, I may as well confide to you that in inviting him here I had an idea. I hoped that my dear Marianne would please him, and then, perhaps, he would try to please her."

"You were wrong to hope so."

"Why? Monsieur Coulanges is sufficiently well off not to care about marrying a fortune."

"He has sworn never to marry."

"Bah! a man always swears to remain a bachelor, but when he meets *the* woman he marries her. You yourself, my dear George, must have taken that oath, and yet, you see! Now, Marianne is an ideal woman."

"Shall I confess that I had guessed your intentions and sounded the doctor, and that his answer was despairingly clear? He thinks Mademoiselle Mezenc charming, but he has not the slightest desire to make her his wife."

"I am sorry of that. But shall we announce the news about ourselves to your friend, so as to make him ashamed of his hard heart?"

"I was just going to ask you if I might do so."

"Remember that after this declaration you *cannot* withdraw."

"Nor you either. That is what I desire."

"Then come and present me as your future wife and I will present Marianne to my future husband. You are not very anxious, I suppose, to visit my dairy to-day?"

"I am only anxious to stay with you always—always," murmured

George, leaning over till his moustache brushed the young widow's cheek.

"Take care," she said, starting. "Some one is coming."

George turned, and, indeed, saw a footman leaving the pavilion. "Your secret is done for," he said, laughing. "Your people know the way here now."

"I must have left the door open, but what does it matter? Madame Bréhal could have secrets, but Madame Courtenay shall have none. Jean has a letter for me. If you request me to read it, I shall ask you to break the seal."

"And if it is for me, you shall open it," retorted George.

It was for him. The footman said that it had been brought by M. Courtenay's valet, and was about to explain, perhaps, how it was that he had ventured upon forbidden ground. However, Madame Bréhal immediately dismissed him.

"It is from my notary," said George, after glancing at the address.

"Then I do not insist on opening it," rejoined the young widow, laughing. "But I do insist on your reading it without delay. Your valet would not have come here after you if the message were not a pressing one."

"I cannot understand it. I have no urgent business with my notary. Still, since you wish it, I will peruse the contents."

George had no sooner read the letter than his face changed. "Ah!" he cried, "here is some very good and very unexpected news. Maurice Saulieu's will has been found."

"Monsieur Saulieu's will found!" exclaimed Madame Bréhal. "I did not know that it was lost."

"No one knew what had become of it," answered George; "I thought I had told you that."

"No, or rather I understood that he had made none."

"That is what I finally thought also; although he said something about a will in a note he wrote to me—an incomplete note, unfortunately. Read this, however, and you will see that everything is satisfactory up to a certain point; there are various restrictions, but your young friend is Maurice's heir."

"Marianne! Oh, George, this is a happy day! It seemed to me that something was lacking to our happiness. It is complete, now that Marianne has her share in it. Read that blessed letter aloud. It will be delightful to hear your voice announce the unexpected news."

"Well, this is what my notary, who was also Maurice's, writes to me:—'Dear Sir,—You will be very much surprised to learn that the will of your friend, Monsieur Saulieu, reached me this morning by post. I have examined it carefully, and find it in proper form. It is drawn up, dated, and signed in Monsieur Saulieu's hand. You are appointed executor, and the sole legatee is Mademoiselle Marianne Mezenc. The will is very simple, and there is no codicil

to it, but the testator has inserted a very singular clause, which I transcribe literally: "On condition that Mademoiselle Mezenc marries the man she loves." The will is none the less valid; for this odd clause can only be considered as the expression of a more or less realisable wish, and not as a *sine quâ non* condition. I only fear that the tardy recovery of this paper may cause certain difficulties. The natural heirs have been placed in possession, and they probably have disposed of part of the property. It is probable, besides, that they will contest the authenticity of a will which is brought forward so unexpectedly, and which comes from no one knows whom. There are, however, certain measures to be taken immediately, and I write to inform you of what has happened, so that you may come as soon as possible to my office. I want to see you before acting, and perhaps by some indications Monsieur Saulieu may have given you we may discover what became of his will which has come to light again in so singular a fashion. I shall be at my office all day, and I shall not go out this evening."

"You must go, George," exclaimed Madame Bréhal.

"Yes, certainly," said George; "although it is very hard for me to leave you at this moment. But what do you think of this strange event? Where was this will which I have sought for so long, and which an anonymous correspondent forwards to the notary, through the post, like an insignificant letter?"

"It came from some friend to whom Monsieur Saulieu had confided it, I suppose."

"That's impossible. Saulieu had no other friend but me, and, besides, the note I found in his pocket-book leaves no doubt. His will was deposited somewhere, in a place where I was to find it and take it to the notary. By a lamentable fatality, however, the bullet which killed Maurice tore the letter, and I was not able to find out what he had done with the will. I searched for it in vain."

"Some one found it by chance, no doubt."

"But that some one would not remain in hiding. He would have taken the trouble to bring it in person to the notary, and explain how he had found it."

"At all events, he is a sensible man, for he might have cast it into the fire or have kept it without showing it, and, on the contrary, he hastened to produce it. However, what does it matter to us who it is, since Marianne inherits?"

"Yes, if the inheritance has not already disappeared. Maurice's country relatives arrived at the first news of his death, and hastened to sell everything that belonged to him. I think, however, that at his banker's entries will be found which will permit us to know at least the approximate amount of his fortune, and then his cousins can be forced to disgorge. But there will certainly be a lawsuit, if Mademoiselle Mezenc decides to claim her rights, which for my part I doubt."

"Why do you doubt it?"



"Because, from the very first day, she declared to me that she would not accept the fortune."

"That is true, she told me so later on, but it would be an act of folly, and I shall persuade her to accept. Why, with this fortune she could marry whomever she liked, and who knows if your friend Coulanges——"

"You forget the condition imposed upon Mademoiselle Mezenc by Maurice. He wished her to marry the man she loved."

"And the doctor isn't that man, evidently. That clause is very queer."

"Didn't I tell you that she never loved Maurice, and that Maurice knew it? Perhaps he also knew that she loved another. He sought death by picking a quarrel with Monsieur de Pontaumur, and, chivalrous as he was, he probably wished to assure Mademoiselle Mezenc's happiness."

"That would be sublime, but she must know the man whom Monsieur Saulieu wished her to marry. I shall question her on the point."

"I do not believe she will answer you; still, she must be informed at once. Before joining her, however, let us return to ourselves. You may believe me very selfish, but I declare that I care more for my own happiness than for Mademoiselle Mezenc's."

"Your happiness will not fly away," said Madame Bréhal, laughing. "We are going to announce it to Dr. Coulanges and Marianne, and if you think that that is not enough to pledge myself, I will proclaim it to all my friends to-morrow. However, you should have said *our* happiness. Do you think that I have no share in it?"

George, overcome with delight, made a movement which proved that Madame Bréhal had acted rightly in preferring the open air for this interview. He opened his arms and seemed about to draw her to his breast, but she stopped him by pointing to the windows of the pavilion, where the doctor was flitting about Mademoiselle Mezenc's easel. "Come, George," said Madame Bréhal, leaning upon his arm, "I will permit you to call me Gabrielle. That concession ought to satisfy you, sir."

They soon reached the pavilion, where the doctor received them with a beaming face.

Mademoiselle Mezenc, for a wonder, appeared very gay. She had descended from the elevated chair on which she sat while painting, and she was laughing at the compliments which Dr. Coulanges had lavished upon her beauty, wit, and even talent, which was doubtful enough. The four seasons, which she had selected as decorative subjects for the marble pavilion, were to occupy four rather narrow panels, and she meant to portray them by their attributes only: flowers, fruits, and other natural products. Perhaps she did not feel herself clever enough to attempt allegorical figures. She had commenced with spring, and was now copying an immense bunch of lilac, tastefully arranged in a bronze *repoussé* basket,

"Come to my rescue, sir," she said to Courtenay; "help me to defend my lilac against your friend, who pretends that lilac is an ugly flower."

"Coulanges is fond of paradoxes," responded George; "but I cannot enter into an argument, for I have come to take leave of you, mademoiselle. I must go immediately to see Maurice Saulieu's notary."

On hearing this Marianne's expression changed.

"He has received my unhappy friend's will," resumed Courtenay, "the will which had disappeared, and which appoints you, Mademoiselle Mezenc, his sole legatee."

"Me! Maurice Saulieu's heir?"

"Yes, my dear Marianne," said Madame Bréhal, "and I am very glad to have been the first to receive this good news."

"I thank you, madame, for your kind intention, but I have no right to this fortune, and I refuse it."

"Why? Monsieur Saulieu was about to marry you——"

"I explained the reasons of my refusal to Monsieur Courtenay a long time ago, and I beg of him to make my refusal known to the notary."

"I will do so, since you wish it, mademoiselle, but my declaration will have no value; in order to refuse an inheritance there are certain formalities to be fulfilled."

"I will fulfil them."

"Marianne, my dear child," resumed Madame Bréhal, "I understand and admire your feelings, but you are not obliged to decide the matter at this very moment, and I have another piece of news to tell you, a piece of news which, I am certain, you will receive with delight. I have taken a great resolution. I am going to marry again."

"You, madame!" murmured Marianne, turning very pale.

"Yes, and you can guess to whom, can't you?" continued Madame Bréhal, with a glance at George.

"No—no. I do not guess."

"Then, let me present to you Monsieur Courtenay, my future husband. He was Monsieur Saulieu's friend, his best friend, and I hope that *you* will be always *my* best friend."

"And I—I hope that you will be very happy, madame," replied Mademoiselle Mezenc, controlling her emotion.

George hastened to put an end to this scene, which the doctor was observing attentively, although, for private reasons, he was particularly pre-occupied about the discovery of the will.

Madame Bréhal alone saw nothing; but then the poets tell us love is blind.

## VII.

THE first day of happiness is the sweetest in a lover's life; but that day has its morrow, and it sometimes happens that the morrow dispels all the happiness of the previous day.

This was certainly not George Courtenay's case after he had become engaged to Madame Bréhal. On the contrary, he felt as if he had a new lease of life. Delivered from the cruel doubts, the weight of which he had borne for three weeks, he viewed the future through a rose-coloured veil, and he was amazed that he had been so slow in understanding that his intimacy with the lovely widow of the Avenue de Villiers could only end in marriage. And, as it often happens when a man has hesitated for a long time, he wished to pass at once from resolution into action. The scene which had taken place in the grounds seemed dream-like to him at moments—like one of those dreams more vivid than others which give the sleeper an illusion of reality, and of which the memory is not dispelled on awakening. The vows exchanged between the Oriental kiosk and the English cottages still rang in his ears, and yet he wondered if it were true that he had won this Gabrielle whom he had loved for a year, without being willing to acknowledge it to himself. He thought of her alone, and the affair of the recovered will did not interest him much more than the private sentiments of Mademoiselle Mezenec.

After the indispensable visit to Maurice Saulieu's notary, George had shut himself up in his house to enjoy his happiness. He did not dare to return to see Madame Bréhal, who perhaps was not sorry to remain alone after so many sweet emotions. He had even forgotten his friend Coulanges, whom he had left with the two ladies in the marble pavilion.

He went to bed very late, and in the morning a gracious little note, signed "Gabrielle," arrived to fill him with delight. Madame Bréhal begged him to join her that evening in her box at the opera, and asked him if he would like to accompany her the next day to some of the fashionable shops. This desire to attend at once to the indispensable preparations for a wedding delighted him, and he had a happy thought. He had seen at his jeweller's a day or two previously a beautiful bracelet, which he thought he might venture to offer to Gabrielle that evening at the opera. He hastened to dress, and was about to go out to make the purchase, when Coulanges arrived with rather an anxious face. Coulanges was the only friend whom Courtenay cared to see at that moment. He received him

with open arms, and began by asking him what had become of him since the day before.

"If I told you that I had passed all my time in running after a damsel who belongs to the stage, you would not believe me," answered the doctor.

"Oh, yes, indeed I should," laughed George. "You are always running after women."

"You needn't laugh. When you know my reasons, I think you will approve of my conduct. But first, let me congratulate you, my dear fellow. Madame Bréhal is charming, and she loves you, I know. I read it in her eyes at the commencement of lunch, and when she came to announce that you had come to an agreement, I saw that she longed to throw herself into your arms."

"You exaggerate matters, my dear Coulanges. But I acknowledge that I feel very happy, for I adore her, and I foolishly tried to prove the contrary. She, on her side, doubted if she had inspired a serious feeling in me. And, from misunderstanding to misunderstanding, we might have remained all our lives loving each other without speaking of it. An explanation was needed to drive away the clouds."

"Confess that I contributed a little to this happy result. If I had not persisted so much, you would not have gone to the lunch. Madame Bréhal would then have been angry, and, who knows, perhaps you would never have seen her again."

"That is true, and I thank you cordially for having forced my hand. But I owe you some information, for that foolish idea of ours about Monsieur de Pontaurmur is set at rest."

"Let us bet that it was what I thought in the first place, an intrigue with a chamber-maid."

"No, Madame Bréhal says not. But she heard the story I told her about our nocturnal adventure so calmly, that I now blush for having suspected her."

"What! did you drag me into the narrative?"

"I couldn't help it, since it was you who saw the man enter the enclosure."

"But what can Madame Bréhal think of me, then? I am afraid that I shall seem a Paul Pry in her eyes, and become her pet aversion."

"Why so? She considers that you have done her a service, for it was important she should be warned of this man's manœuvres. Let me tell you what we think, she and I."

"What I think as well, very probably."

"Well, it appears to us to be evident that Pontaurmur wishes to compromise her, so as to revenge himself for having been disdained and finally dismissed. Last Wednesday, when he called, she sent word, before twenty persons, to say that she was not at home. His sentimental exhibitions upon the embankment have had no other result than to compromise Madame Bréhal, and he wouldn't, perhaps, be sorry if I resented his behaviour on her behalf."

"That would be a very foolish move."

"Yes ; and I shall take care not to make it. There is a simpler means of putting an end to his extravagant conduct, and that is to build a wall twenty feet high round the property, a course which will very shortly be adopted. His trespassing by way of the little gate will also be put a stop to by having the gate nailed up. At present, we can't explain how he obtained the key, but we shall, perhaps, end by knowing. He must have taken an impression of the lock or used a skeleton key. However, what did he go there for ? Upon this point an idea has occurred to me. I think that on the evening you saw him, he was roaming as usual about the house. He must have seen you leave your cab and enter it again. Then, reflecting that you would be very much astonished at seeing him at such an hour at the end of the Avenue de Villiers, and hoping that you would follow him, he arranged so as to pass close to your cab."

"That is quite probable, and I was right in preventing you from giving the alarm. If Madame Bréhal's servants had surprised him hidden in the pavilion, there would have been a frightful scandal, and that is exactly what he wanted. You would not believe, by the way, how Mademoiselle Mezenc detests him ; she spoke of him to me with absolute horror."

"She must, indeed, have many reasons to hate him. But, since you have spoken of her, tell me what you think of her ?"

"I found her absolutely charming. She is very beautiful, and she has a deal of wit and a feeling heart, too feeling a heart, perhaps."

"Then she pleases you ! When I tell Madame Bréhal that, she will be delighted."

"Good heavens ! Has she any intentions in regard to me ?"

"Yes, matrimonial ones, my dear fellow. There, the secret is out. But I am not uneasy. You will know how to defend yourself."

"Yes, indeed. And I shall have no difficulty in doing so, for I have an idea that the young lady's heart is already captured. She loves some one, and she loves hopelessly. I guessed that while talking to her. And certainly I have inspired the passion which has taken possession of her heart."

"At all events, her husband won't be unlucky, for Maurice left her a very pretty fortune. He was richer than I thought."

"But she refuses this fortune. She said so in your presence, and she repeated it again and again after your departure. Madame Bréhal tried to persuade her that she ought to accept it, but it was of no use."

"As long as she has not renounced our friend's legacy by a formal deed, she can always change her mind," said George, shaking his head.

"Then you do not believe in the sincerity of her apparent disinterestedness ?" asked the doctor, quickly.

"I have no fixed opinion on that point; I only have some doubts. But what do you think about this recovery of Maurice's will?"

"It is precisely about that matter I want to speak. I have several things to tell you, and several things to ask. You saw the notary?"

"Yes, yesterday, on leaving Madame Bréhal's house. He understands nothing, and, in fact, the whole affair is incomprehensible. The will reached him by post. The address, in a writing we neither of us knew, bore the stamp of the Madeleine office. Inside the envelope there was not a line, not a word of explanation. The sender maintained absolute incognito."

"But, by searching for him, it seems to me that he might be found. You, who knew Saulieu so intimately, must know what persons he might have confided the will to."

"I know of no one. Besides I was destined to take the will to the notary. The note I found in his pocket-book is evidence of that. The will was in his rooms, I am almost certain. Still, I searched there on the day after the duel, and could not discover it. Two days later, his provincial cousins arrived and took possession of all that belonged to him, and I then retired, as you are aware."

"Do you imagine that these relations have found the paper which disinherited them, and have been honest enough to send it to the notary?"

"Oh! no. On the contrary, I am convinced that if they had found it they would have burned it. One person alone was interested in its production, and that person is Mademoiselle Mezenc."

"Who refuses to benefit by it, and who, perhaps, was even ignorant of the fact that she had been made sole legatee."

"She knew, at least, that a will existed. I told her so."

"But what reason could she have for producing it, since she will not accept the legacy?"

"Perhaps to show people how disinterested she is by renouncing it publicly."

"You think it was she who sent it, then? The deuce! That is a strange idea!"

"Well, my dear fellow, I affirm nothing. I simply appeal to my reason, and my reason leads me to think that Mademoiselle Mezenc might very well have something to do with this mysterious recovery of the will."

"Because she is the heir," murmured the doctor, thoughtfully.

"But I also appeal to my reason, and I wonder, in the first place, why she waited three weeks before sending this will to the notary?"

"Probably because she did not have it."

"Then she must have found it some time after Saulieu's death. Has she been to his rooms?"

"Not that I know of. Seals were immediately affixed to the various articles of furniture, and they were only taken off at the request of his relations."

"Who doubtless took good care that no stranger entered their cousin's abode. It must be supposed, then, that one of them, seized with a sudden friendship for Saulieu's sweetheart, sacrificed his own interests to enrich her."

"That is highly improbable. None of them knew her."

"Or perhaps one of her friends discovered the will by some unexplained chance?"

"I do not know if she has any friends. But what is the use of worrying yourself about it? It is time lost, doctor, and for my part I confess that the problem does not interest me. I have done my duty. I went to the notary because he summoned me. I told him that, as Maurice had appointed me his executor, I would acquit myself of the obligation as well as possible; but I also pointed out to him that it did not depend upon me to make the relatives disgorge, or to induce Mademoiselle Mezenc to accept the legacy. He promised to see to this, and he will do whatever is best. The rest is of little consequence to me; and besides, just now I have no time to waste in trying to guess riddles. You, however, who are not going to be married, can try, if it amuses you."

"It does not amuse me precisely, but it makes me feel uneasy. And since you see no reason why I should not mix myself up in it, you will perhaps answer one more question."

"What is it?"

"Do you know if poor Saulieu's furniture has been sold?"

"Oh! of course it has. The cousins lost no time in disposing of what they could not carry away. There will be some difficulty in recovering the property from them, if Mademoiselle Mezenc claims it."

"But the furniture?"

"Oh, the furniture wasn't worth much. Maurice was a sort of stoic who despised luxury, and he had only some common stuff in his rooms. I even remember that Mademoiselle Mezenc, who did not share his ideas in this respect, sometimes scolded him about it."

"Then the heirs did not take away the furniture?"

"No, certainly not. They sent it to the auction rooms in the Rue Drouot."

"When?" exclaimed the doctor.

"I don't know exactly. Stay! Yes, the notary told me that the sale took place quite recently."

"Oh, the day before yesterday, perhaps?"

"I can't tell precisely. But if you want to know for certain I can ask the notary. But what the deuce do you mean by asking all these questions, you puzzling doctor?"

"You shall know in a moment. I have not yet finished. Did you ever notice in Saulieu's rooms a sort of ebony chiffonier?"

"Never. Maurice had nothing of that sort."

"The one I speak of was old, or, at least, it looked old. It was in bad condition."

"Then I am certain that it did not belong to Maurice, for Maurice only liked new things. If he had had such a thing as you speak of he would have got rid of it, or had it 'restored,' as people say."

"It is singular ; I imagined——"

"What ? that Maurice had artistic tastes ? You are quite mistaken. Maurice was very well educated, and very intelligent, but he did not appreciate antiquities and bric-à-brac. A man can't be fond of everything."

"But he was fond of books ?"

"Yes ; he was not a large buyer, but the books he possessed were well chosen, and he took great care of them."

"Then he had a book-case to keep them in ?"

"Not precisely. His study was furnished with some wooden shelves on which there were a few hundred books. His favourite works—those he read constantly—he kept in a queer sort of a thing, half shelves and half drawers, of moderate dimensions, and very common-looking, which was placed by his bedside."

"I thought you said just now that he did not like antiquities ?"

"Oh ! he valued that affair as a souvenir."

"Was not this book-case fastened to a table ?"

"Yes ; and it was the legs of this table that gave it a particular value in his eyes."

"They were newer than the rest of it, were they not ?"

"Yes. How did you know that ?"

"Wait a minute. Describe the object, please."

"Well, as far as I remember, it came to Maurice from his uncle, who died last year, and Maurice kept it, I don't know why, for it was of no use. Two of the legs were gone."

"And he had new ones made ?"

"Yes. Among other talents, Mademoiselle Mezenc possesses that of making some pretty little things in wood and ivory. She has at her house a very old-fashioned affair, a sort of turning-lathe, such as used to be seen in the days of Louis XVI. Girls used to 'turn' then ; afterwards they played on the harp, and now they drive one mad with that abominable instrument, the piano."

"And it was Mademoiselle Mezenc who turned the legs of the table ?"

"Exactly ; and Maurice, delighted with the gift, would not have parted with his book-case for all the gold in the world. But I wish you would tell me how these particulars can possibly interest you ?"

"Well, what if I told you that the heirs sold this piece of furniture ?"

"What of it ? They had no reason for keeping any relics."

"And that I was present when it was sold ?"

"Where ? at the Hôtel Drouot ?"

"You no longer remember, then, the conversation that took place the other day, while we were dining at the club ?"

"I wasn't listening. My mind was occupied with other matters."



I only remember what Capdenac, the architect, said about Pontaurmur."

"Then you did not hear what that idiot of a Vervelle yelled out from one end of the table to the other, asking me what I had been doing at the sale with an actress of the Bouffes?"

"No ; and I don't see——"

"Why, it was that actress who bought the piece of furniture with the new legs."

"Great good may it do her !"

"She bought it with my money, and it cost me twenty-five louis."

"So much the worse for you. But, my dear fellow, if it was to narrate your follies that you have detained me here for the last half hour, I must say that I find the joke rather out of place."

"You don't understand. I would have paid fifty louis rather than let Monsieur Corléon have the thing."

"Did he want to buy it?"

"Yes, at any price. I only obtained it by accident, so to speak, because the auctioneer knew me and knocked it down quickly without giving Corléon time to bid again."

"That is singular—Corléon wanting to buy a book-case which belonged to the victim of his friend Pontaurmur ! Well, you secured it. What did you do with it?"

"Oh ! I let my little friend have it, and I regret having done so."

"What, my dear Coulanges, you regret having been generous to a woman ? I don't recognise you."

"And I, my dear Courtenay, am astonished that you have so little perspicacity. Hasn't the idea occurred to you of connecting this story of the auction with an event which must preoccupy you, whatever you may say?"

"No, indeed. You completely upset my ideas by jumping so suddenly from my notary's office to the auction-room."

"The connection is not difficult to see, however."

"Possibly, but I don't see it yet. Enlighten me, O Coulanges !—enlighten my feeble intelligence !"

"Let us see. You told me that Maurice had left in his pocket-book a note which was unintelligible, as the bullet had carried away a part of it, and——"

"Ah ! I see now !" cried George. "Maurice had deposited his will in that queer book-case of his. Yes, yes ! I don't know why I did not think of it at once, for he spoke very often of that ridiculous piece of furniture. Mademoiselle Mezenc had made the legs. That was enough for him to look upon it with veneration. I can't think why I did not look into it."

"Others than you did so, at all events," said the doctor. "But no harm is done, since the will is now in the hands of the notary."

"Others, yes ; but who ? The furniture was entirely at the disposal of the heirs. Immediately after the seals were removed, they

took possession of the rooms, and they did not leave them again, so to speak. They took turns in mounting guard."

"They must have rummaged everywhere. How did it happen that the will escaped their search? Was it hidden in a drawer which they neglected to open? The chiffonier book-case had several drawers."

"I would bet that they opened every one of them."

"Perhaps there was a secret drawer. At all events, it is quite certain that they found nothing; for, if they had discovered the will which disinherited them, the notary would never have heard of it."

"Wait a minute!" said George, striking his forehead. "Yes; I remember now, that in celebrating Mademoiselle Mezenc's artistic merits, Maurice, to give me a proof of her skill, told me that she had hollowed out the legs of the table, and that you had only to unscrew them to find a very appropriate hiding place for important papers. There is no longer any doubt, Coulanges; the will was there, and Maurice's relations did not find it because they did not know of this peculiarity."

"Mademoiselle Mezenc knew about it, though, since she devised it; and, if we were sure that Saulieu told her where he had placed his will, the matter would be somewhat cleared up."

"Not for me, for she could not have touched the book-case, which went straight from Maurice's residence to the auction-room. She did not know the heirs, and she did not buy the book-case."

"No; I did."

"For a young woman with whom you are intimate, I think you told me."

"Yes; for Delphine du Raincy, the hope of the Bouffes."

"Good! And what did she do with her purchase?"

"She at once took it away to her rooms in the Rue de Constantinople."

"Well, perhaps your Delphine had the idea of taking her wonderful purchase to pieces."

"I forbade her touching it before seeing me again. Still, that does not prove anything, I confess, for curiosity is the least of her feelings, and obedience is not one of her virtues. I shouldn't be very much astonished, moreover, if your suggestion were correct, because she had an idea that the chiffonier contained a hidden treasure. Still, admitting that she did find the will, she would never have dreamed of sending it away by post, especially as she did not know Saulieu or his notary."

"That is true. Then we are no further advanced in our conjectures."

"Well, I'm afraid of one thing. Delphine is not incorruptible, and, if she were offered a large sum, she would part with the article. She swore to me that she would never do so; but I do not place much reliance on the oaths of women. Now, if any one has bought

it from her—this purchaser can only have done so in view of securing Saulieu's will, for the chiffonier has no value of its own."

"But who could have bought it?"

"Some one who knew that the will was there."

"But that some one couldn't be Monsieur Corléon. It matters very little to him, I imagine, whether Mademoiselle Mezenc inherits or not. He has no connection with her."

"True; and yet the tenacity with which he bid for that chiffonier has bothered me a good deal. Remember that he was willing to pay a big price for it, and that he has the reputation of generally being stingy. He evidently had some secret reason for wanting it."

"Then it would be necessary to suppose that he acted in conjunction with the sweetheart of Maurice Saulieu, whom his friend Pontaurmur killed. If that were the case, Mademoiselle Mezenc would be a worthless creature."

"That is the reason why I do not like to believe in any understanding between them. Still, if it were proved to me that Corléon bought the piece of furniture from Delphine, the complicity would almost be proved. Let me see. The sale took place on the day before yesterday, in the afternoon, and the notary received the will yesterday morning. The person who sent the document by post must have procured it the day before yesterday, in the evening."

"By obtaining the book-case from the girl. Well, you know all about that. You have been to see Delphine, I suppose?"

"Unfortunately, I am not certain on the point. When I left her at the door of the auction-rooms, I told her I should go to see her the next day, which was yesterday. Now, yesterday we were invited to Madame Bréhal's, and I had no time to go to the Rue de Constantinople before the afternoon."

"I understand, but when you knew that the will had miraculously turned up again, you should have hastened to Delphine."

"I did not fail to do so. But Delphine, who was to have waited for me, had gone out. I told her maid that I would return at dinner-time, and I did so; but madame had come in during the interval between my two calls, dressed and gone out again. She had not left even a word of apology for me."

"That was unpardonable," said George, laughing. "She ought not to have acted in that way to a friend who makes her presents."

"Well, I said to myself that there must be something under all this that I did not know, especially as the girl has a very pronounced bump of gratitude. As it happened, I was not mistaken. I went again this morning to the Rue de Constantinople, and again I learned that Madame du Raincy was out."

"This is becoming serious; and if you were jealous——"

"Jealous of Delphine? Oh! dear me, no; but for other reasons I could not understand her prolonged absences. I talked with the maid, and she told me that on the day before yesterday her mistress had made a new acquaintance, a noble lord, so she called

him ; and I found out that he had called there for the first time at five o'clock, that is, while I was walking with you about the horse show, and just an hour after the sale."

"And you concluded that it was his design to appropriate that ugly piece of furniture. That is rather a far-fetched conjecture."

"I should not be surprised if it were a correct one."

"At all events this gentleman wasn't Monsieur Corléon, since he dined that evening at the club, at the same table as ourselves."

"Corléon has friends, remember. One of them might have played the part of a nabob with Delphine, and taken advantage of his intimacy to examine the book-case."

"Did you ask the maid if the book-case was still there?"

"Yes ; but she did not seem to know what I meant. I had given her a louis for her information, and I did not get much for my money. Still, I do not consider myself beaten. I shall return to the chase ; I know Delphine's habits, and I am sure I shall find her."

"Dear me ! doctor, I admire your zeal, and I confess that it astonishes me. What good would it do you even if you did discover that there are some mysteries in Mademoiselle Mezenc's life ? You do not think of marrying her ?"

"No, of course not ; but—don't you think, my dear George, that if this young girl is in connivance with Monsieur de Pontaurmur's acolyte, it would be well to let Madame Bréhal know what sort of a girl she is chaperoning ?"

"Bah ! that won't last long. Our marriage will settle all that ?"

"The fact is, it seemed to me that Mademoiselle Mezenc expressed anything but delight when Madame Bréhal informed her that she was going to marry you ; and if I dared to tell you of an idea that came to me——"

"You may do so. I think that I can guess what it is."

"Well, I wondered if you had not inspired a sentiment in her which she keeps carefully hidden, but which her eyes sometimes betray. Yesterday, in the kiosk, she gave a glance at you, and another at Madame Bréhal, who, however, perceived nothing."

"I have spoken to Madame Bréhal in a warning way already, and I shall do so again this evening at the opera."

"You will not speak to her, I suppose, of our conjectures in regard to the young lady?"

"No, no. I shall wait until we are certain. And now, my dear Coulanges, you must allow me to leave you. I am no longer my own master, you know ; I am going to buy my engagement present, and unless you care to go with me to the jeweller's shop——"

"It would be amusing enough, but it is better for me to try and find Delphine. This is the time she generally returns from her rehearsal, and I have some chance of finding her at home."

"Good luck to you, then ! Shall I see you to-morrow ?"

"This evening, if you like, at the club, after the opera."

"Very well," answered George, and then the two friends separated.

## VIII.

DR. COULANGES, after his chat with George Courtenay, went away in a very reflective mood. His suspicions had assumed shape, and become much more precise, since he knew that the notary had received the will. He had scarcely any doubt now but what this will had been hidden in the ebony chiffonier ; and to be certain on that point he had decided to push the investigation as far as possible. He had taken some time in initiating his researches ; but, once started, he recognised no obstacles.

The twenty-five louis expended in the auction-room were nothing. He no longer regretted them, and he was ready to make any sacrifice to attain his object. But the problem was a complicated one. It was no longer a simple question of merely knowing what Monsieur Corléon hoped to find in the chiffonier-book-case : it was necessary, also, to find out why he was so greatly interested in Marianne Mezenc, who alone profited by the unexpected discovery of Maurice Saulieu's will.

At the horse show, upon first meeting the poor girl whom the duel of Gennevilliers had prematurely widowed, that Marianne upon whom M. de Pontaumur's bullet had recoiled when it stretched her lover low, he had been bewildered by her beauty. On the following day, at Madame Bréhal's, her wit had charmed him. She had inspired him with more than admiration ; indeed, with sympathy. And he did not often feel that sentiment for a woman, being naturally disposed to realise the defects rather than the virtues of the weaker sex. He even thought he had detected that Mademoiselle Mezenc was not exactly pleased with the idea of George Courtenay marrying Madame Bréhal. He also wondered if she were not jealous of the happiness of her benefactress, but for all that, it was hazardous to take this young girl for an accomplice of M. Corléon ; and although he had momentarily ventured to entertain the ideas of his friend Courtenay, he could not really believe that Marianne had been mixed up in any way with M. de Pontaumur and his companions. She declared that she would not accept the legacy left her, and this forestalled all harsh suppositions. Thus, in pursuing his task as a detective, Coulanges hoped that at one and the same time he would be able to demonstrate Corléon's guilt and Marianne's innocence. He was certainly inclined to think that the affair of the auction-rooms in the Rue Drouot was connected in some mysterious way with the criminal fraud which had cost Saulieu his life, and, indeed, in the heat of conversation he had almost told

George the story of the wooden bullet and the screw driven into the butt of one of the pistols. However, he did not wish to disturb Courtenay's happiness, and, besides, he judged it wiser to complete his investigations before revealing all the facts to his friend.

Meanwhile, he could not employ his time in a better way than in searching for Delphine, and he now walked towards the Rue de Constantinople, which is not far from the Rue de Milan. He gained nothing for his pains, however. The door-keeper told him that Madame du Raincy had not returned, and Coulanges did not care to climb four flights of stairs to talk to a maid who gave him so little information with regard to her mistress. He feared that the girl would end by thinking him ridiculous; and he did not care to play the part of a lover who comes three or four times a day to ring the bell of an apartment where he is not wanted. Delphine, besides, would not pass the whole week in running about to restaurants, and by returning on some occasion at the dinner-hour the doctor would have a chance of finding her in. He also said to himself that, after the fashion of Amanda—the Amanda of the popular Parisian song—Delphine adored riding about in cabs and livery-stable victorias, and that, by pushing on towards the Champs-Élysées, he might, perhaps, perceive her coming from the Bois de Boulogne, and stop her as she passed.

It was just the time when the carriages return from the fashionable drive; and it was superb weather—clear, and not too warm; a spring day, such as is seldom seen, even in Paris. Coulanges was afflicted with a tendency to stoutness, and on hygienic principles he liked to walk, so he did not neglect this opportunity for a little exercise, but took the longest way by the Boulevards and the Place de la Concorde. As he reached the right hand footwalk of the Champs-Élysées, which fashionable promenaders prefer, the return from the Bois was beginning; there was an interminable procession of luxurious equipages and simple cabs. Upon the chairs lining the footwalk sat hundreds of observers, who had come there to inspect the carriages, the horses, and the toilets, or simply to warm themselves in the sun. Young mashers watched for a propitious moment to salute a fashionable woman, which is an excellent way of making passers-by believe that one has fine acquaintances; it little matters to these fellows whether the salute be returned or not.

The doctor was not one of that set, however. He did not give himself the trouble to take off his hat to the capacious landaus and barouches, or the stylish little broughams; but he could have named almost all the women who occupied them, for he knew the Parisian world thoroughly well. After ten minutes' walk, he had only perceived some celebrities who interested him very little, some great ladies who were not his patients, and some queens of the so-called "half-world." The old guard was there in full muster, and he had too often passed both rank and file in review to take any pleasure in contemplating them now. He soon tired grew of elbowing and

being elbowed by the crowd which thronged the footway, and he decided to sit down near a tree, about which there were some vacant chairs. He considered, with reason, that he would there be able to examine at his ease the many vehicles which passed down the avenue. All kinds of carriages were to be seen, from superb landaus, with powdered footmen and coachmen, with crests upon their panels and the harness of their horses, to hired victorias driven by coachmen in white cotton gloves. Delphine would probably be in one of the latter vehicles, so Coulanges merely inspected the closed or open vehicles of a modest aspect which defiled before him. It was trouble lost, however, for he saw only unknown faces.

The ungrateful occupation to which he had conscientiously devoted himself ended by wearying him, and he thought of going away, when, not far from the spot where he had taken up his position, he noticed a little brougham stationed close to the kerbstone which separates the sidewalk from the roadway. This brougham had an air of mystery about it. It was painted dark green, without a crest or any initials on the door-panels, and was drawn by a handsome sorrel horse, which a coachman in a coat with three capes had some difficulty in keeping quiet. The window-panes of the carriage were down, but the little wooden shutters were up—that on the off-side being completely raised, while that on the side of the footwalk was raised only two-thirds of its height. And on the top of this latter shutter there rested a black-gloved hand—the tiny hand of a woman who was seated inside the carriage. This hand seemed to be a signal. The fingers were nervously beating a tattoo on the top of the shutter. The lady was doubtless waiting for some one, and was growing impatient at his non-arrival. This was certainly not Delphine's hand, however. The careless young woman whom Coulanges had been seeking for twenty-four hours would not have dreamed of hiding herself. She would, on the contrary, have been very proud to show herself in so fine a turn-out. And then, too, Delphine betrayed her unaristocratic origin in the size of her hands and feet; whereas the hand which Coulanges now saw was small and well-formed.

This was, doubtless, one of those little Parisian incidents which are witnessed so often that they no longer excite the curiosity of passers-by, and under any other circumstances the doctor would have taken no notice of it; but just now everything interested him. Since he had exercised his mind so much in guessing enigmas, he pictured enigmas in the most insignificant occurrences, so he did not lose sight of the carefully-closed brougham, and even prepared to approach it at the risk of missing the damsel he was watching for. However, at the very moment when he was about to rise, at some thirty paces from himself, and about twenty from the carriage, he perceived Monsieur de Pontaumur advancing with a cigar in his mouth. Instead of following the band of asphalt which marks the middle of the broad footwalk, Monsieur de Pontaumur was approaching

between the benches and chairs under the trees. He did not as yet see Coulanges, but if the latter had carried out his plan they would soon have been face to face.

Coulanges had the presence of mind to remain seated, and Pontaurmur, as he arrived opposite the brougham, stopped short, and commenced to study the horse. Immediately the hand disappeared and the shutter was drawn up. "I have good eyes," thought the doctor, "and if the lady opens the door I shall see who it is."

However, Pontaurmur, after pausing for a moment, turned back a little, left the side walk, passed behind the carriage and suddenly became invisible. Ten seconds later, the sound of a door being hurriedly closed fell upon Coulanges' ear, and the sorrel horse started off like a flash, dragging the brougham up the avenue.

Coulanges had not understood all this very well, and when the brougham rolled away he expected to see Pontaurmur standing in the place where he had seen him disappear behind the carriage. But no. The carriage had carried Pontaurmur away to unknown regions, with a woman who was equally unknown, at least to Coulanges. The operation had been so deftly performed that it must have been arranged beforehand. It was an abduction; but instead of the man carrying the woman away, as usually occurs, it was the woman who had carried off the man, and the site of this elopement had been singularly chosen. As a rule, lovers who have anything to hide do not make appointments in the middle of the Champs-Élysées, at the time when all the carriages are returning from the Bois. However, the understanding was evident. The brougham had come from the Place de la Concorde, and it had stopped just opposite the grand entrance of the Palais de l'Industrie. Pontaurmur had approached in an opposite direction, and had been on the look-out for the carriage, for he had walked as near as possible to the roadway, and given a glance at each passing or stationary vehicle. No one, to tell the truth, had taken any notice of his manoeuvres—no one except Coulanges. The chairs in the vicinity of the carriage were occupied by a middle-class family; these good people were admiring the scene, and even if they had noticed a gentleman walk behind the carriage, they would surely not have suspected any mischief.

"Did Pontaurmur perceive me?" wondered the doctor. And he answered himself: "No, it is not probable. If he had known that I was here he would have gone on his way, making a sign to the lady to go and wait for him further on. He did not suspect that I was watching him, unless——" At this point the doctor stopped short in his reasoning. The situation suddenly appeared to him in a new light.

"Unless the fellow did it on purpose," he thought, continuing his monologue. "This is perhaps the continuation of his expeditions to the Boulevard Berthier. Who knows, if, even just now, he was not seeking to attract the attention of people who know him?"



He hoped, perhaps, that I should tell this story at the club, and that certain people would believe that the lady in the carriage was Madame Bréhal. It was certainly not she who was in that mysterious brougham; still, nothing would prevent my saying it if I cared to do mischief, or even thinking it; for, after all, I only saw a hand in a black glove."

Upon further reflection, Coulanges concluded that this imaginary supposition could, after all, have no serious basis; Pontaumur might very easily have met a lady in the Champs-Élysées without Madame Bréhal counting for anything in the adventure. Then he again reverted to his occupation of observing the carriages, for he had not yet lost all hope of seeing Delphine pass. At last the idea occurred to him that he would not be much further advanced if she should pass without seeing him. The carriages which descend from the Arc de Triomphe take the southern side of the avenue, and Coulanges, seated on the northern side, could scarcely call across so broad a thoroughfare to the person he was seeking. Having thus reflected, the doctor, in order to be ready for any emergency, hailed a passing cab, and engaged it by the hour, so as to have it close at hand in case he should be obliged to follow Delphine. He no longer particularly relied on her appearance, for it was getting late, but he could still use the cab, as he did not intend to go on foot to the Rue de Constantinople. Some five minutes after he had engaged the cab an elegant blue brougham attracted his attention. This one was not hermetically-closed like the other; the lowered windows permitted him to see the lady who occupied it, and as the horse was not going very fast, the doctor had plenty of time to recognise Madame Bréhal.

"Ah!" he murmured, "I knew very well it wasn't she who went off with Pontaumur."

Of course he bowed, and Madame Bréhal not only returned his bow, but stopped her carriage.

Coulanges, flattered by this attention, hastened to the door, and was received as graciously as possible. "I am delighted to see you," said the lady; "and I have a great mind to take you away with me. We will go as far as the lake, and I will set you down wherever you like."

This amiable proposition did not suit the doctor, and he excused himself as well as he was able. He pretended that he was expected at five o'clock for a consultation.

"You have some patients, then?" asked Madame Bréhal, laughing. "Well, I should not have believed it. But I do not wish to inconvenience you, and I give you your liberty on conditions that you will come and see me as soon as possible. You are George's best friend, and George's friends are mine. Have you seen him to-day?"

"I have just left his house," answered Coulanges.

"He will be at the opera this evening in my box, and there will

be a place for you, if you care to come. We shall be able to talk of my dear Marianne. I fear that she is ill, for she did not come this morning as usual, and on my way home I mean to stop in the Rue Blanche to inquire for her. Good-bye for the present, my dear doctor," concluded Madame Bréhal, making a sign to her coachman to drive on.

"I would have made a bet that dear Marianne would be ill to-day," thought the doctor on returning to his place, "and my prescriptions would not cure her. It is Courtenay's marriage that has given her a heart-ache. She suffers more from that, I fear, than she suffered from poor Saulieu's death. What a singular girl she is! She does not regret her lover, and she will not accept the fortune he left her. She only wants what she can't have. I pity her, but what can I do? I should not succeed in consoling her, and I do not care to try to do so, and yet I acknowledge she is charming. What a pity she doesn't take to the stage, like Delphine! I might then become her physician in ordinary."

This monologue came to an end as Coulanges reached his chair, and, at the same instant, an unexpected spectacle attracted his attention. A victoria came dashing down the avenue, driven by a woman. A groom seated beside her showed unequivocal signs of fear, and the various coachmen, driving in an opposite direction, took good care to keep well out of the way of this conveyance, so as to avoid a collision. The badly-dressed servant, who was not in his proper place; the horse, which had once been a good animal, but was now used up; the lady's manner of driving, were all the height of what is called "bad form," and the people who lined the avenue smiled on perceiving the grotesque equipage.

The doctor laughed, like everybody else, and even more when he recognised the damsel. "It is Delphine," he murmured in amazement.

And she it was. The foolish creature bothered herself but little about turning aside for the other carriages, and seemed to think nothing of the dangers of a collision. Leaning forward, with both hands clasped tight about the reins, she assumed the attitude of a driver at the Hippodrome conducting a four-horse chariot round the arena, and her smiles seemed to say to the astonished promenaders who watched her pass: "Admire me; admire my carriage, my groom, my horse, and my style!"

"If she continues in that way," thought Coulanges, "she will break her neck, there's no doubt of that, and then I shall never know if the will really was in the chiffonier. I will try to overtake her, if only to pick her up when she goes head-over-heels into the gutter."

His cab was standing close by, and the driver held himself in readiness. "Follow that trap," said the doctor, pointing to the victoria. "At the pace it is going, you won't be able to catch it, but you shall have ten francs for yourself if you don't lose sight of it."

"It will be all right," said the driver; "that animal is played out, and my mare is a good one." And upon this assurance the pursuit commenced.

Delphine was already on the Place de la Concorde, but she was now going at a much slower pace; the horse was winded.

"Will she turn and go up the avenue again?" thought Coulanges. "She is quite capable of it. She imagines that all the millionaires of Paris are contemplating her. No; fortunately she is going home. At last we shall have an explanation."

However, to the great astonishment of the doctor, the victoria, instead of taking the Rue Royale, turned into the Rue de Rivoli, which is not the way to reach the Quartier de l'Europe, in which district of Paris Delphine resided.

"Where the devil is she going?" murmured Coulanges, pleased to see that if his cab was not gaining any ground, it was, at all events, not losing any. "Probably to see the rich lord who paid for that frightful turn-out. Well, so much the better; I shall know who he is."

The victoria at last turned into the Rue Castiglione, crossed the Place Vendôme, and, after following the Rue de la Paix, took the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs. Coulanges did not understand this at all, but he encouraged his driver to keep on, and the driver plied his whip vigorously. All went well as far as the corner of the Rue Vivienne. But there an omnibus barred the passage of the cab, while the victoria, which still had a good start, continued on its way. The doctor, excited by the ardour of the pursuit, swore at his driver, who could not, however, do anything. It was impossible to advance. One of the omnibus wheels had become locked with that of a waggon, and the huge vehicle encumbered the street. It even intercepted the view, and although Coulanges rose to his feet, he could not perceive the victoria. The cabman, however, turned round to say to him: "Have no fears, sir; I haven't lost it. It has turned down the Rue des Petits-Pères."

But this information did not reassure the doctor. The street in question is not long, but it is crossed by three or four other streets which extend in different directions. How was it possible to guess whether the capricious Delphine had taken one of those which lead towards the Bourse, or had continued straight on towards the Quartier Bonne-Nouvelle? Coulanges had grown delighted with the chase, and he would have scrambled all over Paris to capture his prey. Finally, after three or four minutes, which seemed like an hour to the doctor, the omnibus was set free and rolled on, the block ceasing. Coulanges' driver meant to gain his gratuity, and he managed so well that he immediately took the lead, and his horse, upon being vigorously whipped, dashed into the Rue des Petits-Pères, which begins at the square of the same name.

As the cab entered this open space, the doctor had the unexpected satisfaction of perceiving the victoria standing before the

church of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires (Our Lady of Victory). Delphine, however, was not there. Her groom, who had alighted, was examining the knees of the panting horse, and he did not appear very well pleased. He seemed to be asking himself if the poor animal would hold out until it reached the stable. The intelligent cabman who had driven Coulanges now drew up against the sidewalk at the corner of the little, unfrequented passage, which communicates with the Rue de la Banque, and the doctor lost no time in alighting.

"Well, sir, you didn't expect that, nor I either," said the Jehu, pointing with the end of his whip to the victoria and the portal of Notre-Dame-des-Victoires. "I knew I should catch that trap at last, though; but the livery-stable keeper won't be very well pleased, for that horse yonder is foundered."

"Wait for me here," interrupted the doctor, who did not wish to be left in the lurch, if, by any chance, the chase should begin again, and then he walked quickly towards the church. All was dim within the sacred edifice which, moreover, seemed to be deserted. He discerned, however, some tapers burning at a side altar, and, at last, in the gloom he perceived a woman kneeling hard by, as if in prayer. It was Delphine. Coulanges did not wish to disturb her, and feeling confident now that he should not miss her, he went out and took up his station before the door.

He had not long to wait. The damsel soon came out of the church, and gave a little cry of surprise on seeing him; however, she did not attempt to avoid him; on the contrary, she came towards him with her hand held out and a smile upon her face. "What! is it you?" she exclaimed. "Ah, I didn't expect to meet you here. All the same, I am very glad to see you, my dear doctor."

"So am I glad to see you," growled Coulanges. "I have been running after you for two days past."

"Yes, I know; my maid told me that you had called, and I was very sorry that I was not at home, but it wasn't my fault."

"Humph! You have made the conquest of a Russian prince. The girl told me that; but that is no reason for treating me as you have done. You might have left some message for me. If I hadn't seen you pass in the Champs-Élysées, I should still be wondering what had become of you."

"Ah! did you see me? In my victoria? How do you like it?"

"It is simply awful, my dear! The horse is twenty years old, if he is a day; and your groom looks as if he came out of a Jew pawnbroker's shop. If your boyard gave you that present——"

"Oh, no! I hired that for the day. I am going to have another one—of my own, and which will be in the real style. However, I was in a hurry to cut a dash, and——"

"And you did cut a dash, indeed. Everybody was looking at you—and laughing at you."

"Because I drove myself? Why so? I didn't manage so badly, for a woman who has never learned."

"It was a miracle that you did not knock somebody down, especially in the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs, which isn't very broad."

"So you have been following me, then?"

"Quite so, since I am here. I followed you in a cab; I lost you ten times on the way, however, and I certainly did not expect to find your rattletrap outside a church."

"I went in to burn a taper to Our Lady."

"And what have you asked of Our Lady?"

"Well, I don't mind telling you. I wanted a—a certain gentleman to return."

"Ah! I knew there was a gentleman in the case. But what about this one—the prince, I suppose; has he deserted you already?"

"No—that is to say—well—we were to dine last night together at the Pavilion d'Armenonville. He told me that he would send his carriage at seven o'clock; but as it didn't come I took a cab and went there, but I didn't find him."

"Indeed! That's a bad sign. And to-day——"

"To-day I went to the Grand Hôtel, where he is stopping. But he had gone out. Then I hired a victoria by the day. I hoped to meet him in the Bois, and I made the tour of the lake fifteen times, but he was not there."

"He has been making fun of you."

"It looks like it; and yet I cannot believe it. He is so gentlemanly, and then it all happened so queerly."

"Tell me about it, and perhaps I shall be able to give you some good advice."

"I ask nothing better, for I don't know what to do. But we can't talk here."

"Well, let us go to your house. I don't suppose you mean to turn me from your doors, although you haven't been at home to me for the last few days. Come, it would be too bad to quarrel with an old friend."

"Quarrel with you? Never! In the first place, you brought me luck."

"Bah! How was that?"

"Why you took me to the auction-rooms, and it was there that he noticed me."

"At the auction-rooms?" exclaimed the doctor, who at once thought of Corléon.

"Yes, indeed," said Delphine, "at the auction-rooms; but I didn't see him."

"This is very curious," interrupted Coulanges; "and you must tell me all about it. Send your turn-out away. I have a cab which will take us to your house, and we can talk on the way. Is your victoria paid for?"

"No ; I owe thirty francs, without counting the gratuity for the groom."

Coulanges would have given a deal more not to lose the information he expected to obtain from Delphine, so he put two louis into the hand of the groom, who was longing to take his unfortunate horse back to the stable.

Delphine, always appreciative of kind acts, entered the cab. The doctor gave the address to the driver, and they rolled off at a moderate pace towards the Rue de Constantinople.

"It seems, then," began the doctor, "that your Russian prince——"

"In the first place," replied Delphine, "he is not a Russian at all ; he is a Spaniard, and his name is Fernando."

"What else ? The Castilians have a dozen names."

"Perhaps so. But he did not think it best to tell me all his names."

"You should have asked him."

"I didn't think of it, and besides, I expected that he would return. He told me that he lived at the Grand Hôtel, and I imagined that he was very well known there."

"And when you asked for Monsieur Fernando, the flunkeys laughed in your face, eh ? Confess that you have been somewhat of a goose."

"My dear friend, anybody would have been taken in. A gentleman who takes me to dine at Bignon's, and slips twenty-five louis under my plate—of course I had confidence in him. Well, to proceed : After dinner we returned to my house to take tea. He asked me to sing something. He is very fond of music, and as I am as yet only so-so as regards musical ability, I suggested I should go for Angèle, one of my friends of the Bouffes, who plays the piano like an angel. He jumped at this proposition, so I went for Angèle—she lives in the same street as I do—and she played all Offenbach's best airs to us ; and at midnight Fernando took his leave."

"When did you first see him ?"

"He came to my house on the day before yesterday."

"At what time ?"

"As I was dressing to go to the theatre, about two hours after I left the auction rooms. I had just installed my ebony chiffonier in the drawing-room ; it looks very pretty there."

"Is it still there ?" asked the doctor, cagerly.

"Why, do you imagine that I have sold it ? No danger, my dear doctor, that I should part with an object given me by you. And the proof of it is, that I could have got a bigger price than was paid for it before leaving the auction room. The old Jew offered me fifty francs more if I would let him have it."

"Yes, I know ; but didn't you tell me that a gentleman who stood near the auctioneer complimented you ?"

"Yes ; a scraggy little fellow, as dark as a mulatto ; but I did

not answer him. I was too much occupied in giving my address to the clerk who had received my money."

"You had no need to give it, since you took the chiffonier away with you. Then this scraggy little gentleman knew your address?"

Delphine, in a few words, had given a correct description of Corléon, and the doctor was wondering if it were he who had played the part of a hidalgo.

"I don't know whether he heard it or not," replied Delphine; "but I do know that I never saw him again. I only saw my Spaniard, who does not resemble him at all."

"But who was also in the room, and who must have asked for your address at the desk. How else could he have found it out?"

"That is true. I hadn't thought of that. Well, whether he did that or not, he came to see me two hours after the sale. He declared that he had seen me at the theatre, and that he greatly admired me. I felt complimented of course, and I didn't turn him out."

"No—you dined with him; you had music in the evening, and then he bade you good night. Well, what else?"

"That is about all. Fernando has not appeared again, though he promised to come the next day."

"Let me see. When you went to fetch Angèle, did he remain alone in your rooms?"

"Certainly—the girl had gone out—I had no reason to fear that he would steal anything. He was a gentleman; I told you that. But the next day I waited for him all the afternoon, without his turning up; still, I am sure he will come again."

"Pooh! You already know that he does not live at the Grand Hôtel, as he pretended. I would bet that he is no Spaniard, either."

"He does speak French perfectly, that's a fact."

"He is probably some practical joker."

"Excuse me," exclaimed Delphine, getting vexed; "you forget that he made me a present of twenty-five louis. The joke would be a trifle expensive, and I can't see any reason for it."

"I am afraid I do," muttered the doctor. "But tell me how old is your Fernando, and what does he look like?"

"He seems to be about forty. He is very tall, and with extremely broad shoulders; he has a singular face, quite a bronze colour; he wears a full black beard, and his hair is a little grey near the temples. Still he is quite a swell, and all the women would run after him, simply for his looks."

"Did he wear a dark-green overcoat?"

"Exactly."

"And a diamond in his neckcloth?"

"A big diamond. Ah! you know him, then?"

"Perhaps I do," said Coulanges. "But here we are at your door. Will you permit me to come in? I want to see the chiffonier again."

"What a queer idea! But, if it amuses you, come on."

The cab had just stopped. The doctor, preceded by Delphine, ascended the stairs, and they had scarcely entered the apartment when he ran into the drawing-room, where he had the satisfaction of perceiving the famous piece of furniture. To take off the top piece, turn the table over, with its four legs in the air, and kneel down to complete the operation he was bent upon, was the work of a minute for Coulanges.

"Are you crazy?" asked Delphine in amazement.

The doctor, instead of replying, unscrewed the legs, one after the other, without any difficulty, and saw that Courtenay's information was correct. The legs were hollow and—they were empty. He shook them, and then from one of the cavities there fell some pink string which might have been used to tie up a roll of papers.

"Idiot that I was!" screamed Delphine. "The legs of the chiffonier were full of bank-notes, and I never suspected it!"

"Bank-notes? No, I think not," said Coulanges. "But, all the same, you did very wrong to leave Fernando alone with your chiffonier."

"Ah! the thief! It was to rob me that he sent me to Angèle's! And I believed in his taste for music! Heavens and earth! If I ever get him in my clutches again, he will pass a bad quarter of an hour!"

"If you see him again I advise you not to say anything to him, but to follow him at a distance, until he enters some place, and then send for me by a messenger. In that way you will lose no time."

"And now, you are going?"

"Yes. I have some business to attend to, but come and see me to-morrow. You have rendered me a great service by telling me all about Fernando, and you deserve a reward."

The doctor took a hasty leave of Delphine (who vainly endeavoured to retain him), and darted down the four flights of stairs.

"Now," he thought. "I realise what has happened; I can see it as clearly as if I had been there; Corléon failed to obtain the chiffonier, but he had Delphine's address. He did not dare to operate himself, as he feared I might have warned the girl against him; so he went and joined a friend who was waiting for him to learn the result of the sale, and this friend undertook to play the part of an admirer. The friend was Pontaumur, and he was going to the rendezvous when Courtenay met him leaving the horse show. Delphine described him so exactly that it is impossible for me to be mistaken. All is clear now, all, except one thing—one thing alone. Why is Pontaumur interested in Mademoiselle Mezenc?" And as Coulanges entered his cab again he muttered between his teeth; "That I will find out, I am determined on it, even if I have to spy on them both!"



## IX.

THAT same evening, George, with a white tie and a flower in his button-hole, entered the opera-house at an hour when most fashionable folks are still at dinner. The doctor, who was dining at the *Café Anglais*, was only at the soup, and yet he also intended to show himself in Madame Bréhal's box, in response to her gracious invitation ; but the agreeable prospect of spending an hour or two there did not prevent him from doing full justice to his dinner and enjoying the fine wines he delighted in. This was his way of refreshing himself after the fatigues and emotions of an eventful day.

George, who had no need of stimulants, had dined at home, intoxicating himself with his happiness, and arrived at the theatre before the curtain was up, although he knew very well that he would not find Madame Bréhal there. A lover's watch is always fast, and George was madly, wildly in love. His case did not belong to either of the two best known categories of that affection of the heart, which those who have never been attacked by it treat as a mental disease ; it was not love at first sight, for he had known Madame Bréhal for years ; nor was it that phenomenon which Stendhal called crystallization, for he had not taken time to reflect. It was the bursting forth of a hidden fire which had burnt within him without his being conscious of the fact, and which a word, a look from Gabrielle had caused to blaze up, just as the sudden opening of a window fans a flame. He now wished that this marriage, which he had not thought of three days before, might take place on the morrow. He even intended to ask Madame Bréhal to fix a very early date, and he hoped that she would share his views, for she had let him perceive that she was as impatient as he was to have done with the wearisome preliminaries of their happiness.

On that particular evening "*Don Juan*" (to Londoners "*Don Giovanni*") was to be given, and Gabrielle adored Mozart's music, which is the most agreeable of any to lovers' ears. It was the best accompaniment that George could desire to a low-voiced conversation such as is carried on between two lovers when they isolate themselves in the midst of the crowd. The tinkling airs of a ballet would have annoyed them, and the trumpets of "*Aïda*" would have deafened them.

George arrived as the orchestra was finishing the overture, and entered the box, which was on the first tier. It accommodated five spectators, but there were to be but three, and he could dispose the chairs as he pleased. It was quite a work of art to diminish the

distance between them without tampering with freedom of motion. He listened attentively to the beautiful trio of the death of the Commander, and during the less important passages which followed he gazed through his opera glasses at the house, which was filling more rapidly than usual. "Don Juan" is a treat, and the most blasé subscribers do not like to miss it. George espied many strange faces, for provincials and foreigners literally invaded the opera house, and if this invasion continues, soon not a Parisian will be seen there. However, Courtenay also perceived some people he knew, and as he exchanged bows, it occurred to him that his presence in Madame Bréhal's box was almost equivalent to a public declaration of their intended marriage, and he rejoiced at the thought.

The charming woman to whom the box belonged entered during Zerlina's aria. George felt that it would be bad taste to speak at such a moment, so he contented himself with an eloquent pressure of the hand, and helped her to install herself in a corner of the box, receiving as his reward a smile more expressive than all the words in the world. Madame Bréhal was bravely arrayed, as befitted a solemn occasion. She had selected a gown of turquoise-tinted velvet, embroidered with pearls; the low-cut body being edged with old Venetian point. Her beautiful arms were bare, the dress having narrow shoulder straps of velvet bordered with lace. On her bosom rested a bouquet of gardenias. She carried an exquisite fan, and an enamelled opera glass emblazoned with her monogram in diamonds. On her arm was the bracelet which George had sent her during the day, a marvellous work of art, without counting the value of the stones.

She gave some little nods to certain of her friends, who whispered significantly as they scrutinised her. The particular attention that was accorded to her did not seem to embarrass her at all, and George had the pleasure of seeing that she was proud and happy to show herself in public with him. She soon surrendered to the pleasure of listening to the melodies of Mozart's masterpiece, and Courtenay made no attempt to disturb her enjoyment. However, when it came to the "Masker's Trio," he gently drew close to her, so close that he felt her hair brush his cheek, and they listened in silence to the delicious music.

"How beautiful it is!" murmured George, when the last note died away. "I never appreciated this lovely music before this evening. It was written for lovers, and they alone can understand its meaning."

"True; and I assure you that I understand it," replied Madame Bréhal.

Their hands met, and their eyes exchanged a vow. They were still dreaming when the curtain fell.

A "wait" always brings about a change in attitudes as well as in feelings, and they now resumed their former positions.

"Do you know what I am thinking of?" asked Gabrielle, laughing.

"I am thinking of you," replied George.

"Well, I was thinking of those big boxes at the Opéra Comique, where young girls are brought to be presented to a young man who arrives as if by accident. We have no need to play that farce, but this is indeed our betrothal evening. I read in the faces about me that to-morrow all Paris will know the news, and I am glad to have people know it."

"Then you will not be angry if I implore you to abridge the interval which separates us from this happy day."

"Are you afraid that you will change your mind if you have to wait?"

"You are laughing at me, and I will not venture to ask you the same question. But, seriously, don't you think that there is no more foolish position than that of two people who are engaged and waiting to be married?"

"It is foolish and dangerous, both. Poor Marianne had a cruel experience of that. Fix any day you like, as soon as the law allows,"

"In a month, if you are willing."

"I am not only willing, but I desire it. It is said that there is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip. Well, let us drink the cup before the accident happens. But, speaking of Mademoiselle Mezenc, do you know that I haven't seen her to-day? She did not come to the pavilion this morning, and, as I was returning from the Bois this afternoon, I went to her house, and they told me that she was ill. I asked to see her, and sent in my name, but the answer came that she could receive no one. Her refusal hurt me, and I wonder if I have offended her. Perhaps I ought to have insisted upon her luncheon with us yesterday."

"Do you want my sincere opinion?" interrupted George.

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I think that you occupy yourself altogether too much with Mademoiselle Mezenc."

"You have already told me that, but——"

"Let her sulk if she likes. The decoration of your pavilion will gain by it, and you will lose nothing. She is not to be pitied, since it only depends upon herself to inherit Saulieu's fortune. She pretends that she does not wish for it, but I am sure she will accept it eventually. Perhaps she has already done so."

"George, you are unjust to that young girl."

"Well, when you see the doctor, ask him what he thinks of her."

"The doctor! We shall see him here, I hope. I met him this afternoon in the Champs-Élysées, and I invited him to join us at the opera."

"Ah!" muttered Courtenay, with a slight frown.

"Do you disapprove of it? You do wrong," said Madame Bréhal, smiling. "We shall have plenty of opportunities to remain alone. The presence of your friend in my box will be more remarked than your own. I am burning my ships this evening, and here I am

definitely compromised. If you should ever change your opinion, I should never find any one else to marry me."

"Forgive me, Gabrielle. I love you so much that I am jealous of everybody. It is a bad fault, however, and I will try to cure myself."

"I do not wish you to do so. It is to your jealousy that we owe our happiness. If you had not imagined that Monsieur de Pontaumur——"

"Never speak of that man, I implore you. Every time I hear his name pronounced it enrages me. And when I see him it is much worse, for he bows to me, and I am obliged to return his bow, instead of striking him, as I should like to do."

Madame Bréhal was about to preach moderation, when Coulanges appeared, provided with a box of sweetmeats, which he offered with rather a pretty compliment. He was well received, but his rather old-fashioned gallantry drew a jesting speech from George. "While you were about it, my dear fellow, why didn't you bring some oranges, too?" he asked.

Coulanges defended himself, and Madame Bréhal took his part, averring that the sweetmeats were delicious.

"I do not reproach you for coming late," she said to him with a smile, "but you have sacrificed Mozart's music to the cuisine of the Café Anglais. Come, confess it."

"Oh!" said the doctor, "I will not deny that I only appreciate Mozart after a good dinner. But this evening I should have been here twenty minutes ago, if I had not been stopped at the door by —by a gentleman of our club, a gentleman whose conversation does not amuse me at all, and whom I had great difficulty in getting rid of."

"Who was it?" asked Courtenay.

"The one you see below there in the stalls," responded Coulanges, who already regretted having said so much, and who wished to avoid pronouncing the name of Pontaumur. Madame Bréhal and George both looked in the direction he indicated and immediately recognised the man they detested.

M. de Pontaumur had taken possession of a stall on the left side, that is to say, opposite Madame Bréhal's box, and at this very moment he was looking at her with great attention. He had the tact not to bow, however, and he changed his attitude as soon as he perceived that he had been seen.

"One would really say that he was pursuing me," muttered George.

"He is a subscriber," observed Madame Bréhal. "It is only natural to find him at the opera."

"True," answered Coulanges, "but I also meet him everywhere. I saw him this afternoon in the Champs-Élysées, and I find him here again this evening. It is too much."

"And he accosted you? I should like to know what he said."

"A few polite words. He realises that I bear him no good will

since the duel, and he wishes to renew an intercourse which was, however, never intimate. I could not in decency turn my back upon him, but I was very cold, you may believe it."

"Don't let us think any more of him," said Madame Bréhal.

"It will be all the easier to forget him, as he is going," responded the doctor.

"Yes," said George, "he is moving towards the door. He scarcely sat down."

"It is singular that he should leave just as the wait is nearly over. It looks as though he entered the theatre merely to look at us. However, that man does nothing like any one else." Then as Madame Bréhal made a slight movement of impatience, Coulanges explained his thoughtless words: "Would you believe, madame, that, an instant before meeting you in the Champs-Élysées, I saw him glide mysteriously into a brougham in which an invisible woman was waiting for him? And the brougham bore them away towards the Arc de Triomphe. Was it not singular to choose for such an appointment a spot where all Paris promenades?"

"His system is always the same," growled George. "He advertises himself by pretending to hide."

"This time, at least," said Madame Bréhal, laughing, "I shall not be compromised in Monsieur Coulanges' eyes, since he spoke to me in my carriage while a stranger was bearing this great conqueror away. But let us change the subject. What do you think of this marvellous opera, doctor, which I never hear without delight, and which each time brings me some new sensations?"

"Good gracious! madame," responded the doctor, only too delighted to change the conversation, "you embarrass me terribly. I have stored away in my memory a fine assortment of hackneyed phrases which I might use. I could talk to you of 'fresh melodies,' 'penetrating expression,' 'vigour blended with simplicity,' and so on. I could enlarge upon the merits of the artistes who formerly sung 'Don Juan' and who have never been replaced; but I prefer to tell you that I am not competent to judge Mozart."

"You are not fond of music, and I regret it; but at least you have the courage of your opinion."

"Oh! I adore music—as an aid to digestion. And to be perfectly frank, I am going to say something which will, perhaps, sound dreadful in your ears. When I have had some champagne with my dinner, I feel the need of hearing Offenbach. The fine wines of Burgundy serve me as an admirable preparation to enjoy the masterly works of Meyerbeer. To appreciate Mozart, I must, first of all, taste some delicate Château-Margaux. And, indeed, this evening I treated myself to some of that famous wine—wine which refreshed the old age of the gallant Duc de Richelieu."

"Then you will be able to submit patiently to the four remaining acts. The one which is about to begin is the ballet act, which deserves to be listened to; still I will permit you to talk."

The curtain rose, and the stall vacated by M. de Pontaumur still remained empty.

"Where can he have gone?" wondered Coulanges, whom this abrupt departure considerably puzzled, although he pretended not to attach any importance to it.

Since he had known how the will had reappeared, he had felt very uneasy as to the movements of the man who had killed Maurice Saulieu, and who was evidently conspiring against the repose of Madame Bréhal. He had even made up his mind to watch him, and it was to do so the more easily that he had not repelled his advances, on meeting him in the lobby of the opera-house. He had wished to have a foot in the enemy's camp, and if he had determined not to break with Monsieur de Pontaumur, it was because he was meditating a master-stroke. He intended shortly to bring him face to face with Delphine, and to be present at the explanation which would result when the spurious hidalgo and the actress met. To attain his object, it was necessary to sacrifice his repugnance, and keep up some connection with the so-called Fernando. But while waiting for an opportunity to confound him, Coulanges greatly wished to know what he was doing at this moment.

"He must be hatching some new plot," he thought; "indeed, I should not be surprised if he were preparing some piece of rascality. But what? He cannot murder Madame Bréhal as he murdered poor Saulieu; for he did murder him, I no longer doubt it. The juggling with the bullets was not done without his knowing it. He will not employ that ingenious proceeding to get rid of Madame Bréhal; women do not fight duels. But if she is in his way, as Saulieu was, he will invent some other means. But how was Saulieu in his way? That is what I have not guessed as yet. If I only knew that, I should know all the rest, and I will know it. I am the only one competent to unravel the enigma. Courtenay is in no condition to help me. Lovers are good for nothing."

These reflections were at this point interrupted by Madame Bréhal. Coulanges was seated at the back of the box, and she turned to him to say behind her fan: "Don't you find the Don Juan type of man intensely disagreeable? To love all women implies love of none."

"Not only disagreeable, but ridiculous. This fellow, too, allows himself to be duped like a school-boy. Why, Zerlina herself, that little goose of a Zerlina, deludes him outrageously."

"I wish the same would happen to all who are like him."

"The fact is, he is punished enough, and I do not see why he should be cast into a burning abyss at the end. That torture renders him interesting. It would be enough for him to be ridiculous. His victims would be much better avenged."

"You are right. Contempt is the weapon I should use if I were pursued by a Don Juan, and I should be infinitely obliged if my friends would refrain from all violent means."

George understood the allusion, and his face flushed, for he had not given up the idea of punishing M. de Pontaurmur as soon as he found some pretext for quarrelling with him without compromising Madame Bréhal. However, he said nothing, and the doctor, who shared the pretty widow's views, made no reply. The act finished without any one speaking again, and without M. de Pontaurmur returning.

Coulanges was longing to go and see if he could find him in the lounge or the lobbies. After indulging in wild conjectures as to the motives which had led M. Corléon's friend to leave his place, the doctor had asked himself if it would not be as well to accost him, and lead the conversation to the lady of the Avenue de Villiers. The idea was dangerous, but it had its good side. Pontaurmur might say something which would betray his designs.

"Would you believe it, gentlemen? I came to-night in a cab," said Madame Bréhal at this moment. "I dined very late, and I did not wish to lose the first act. Now, I have a coachman who never has his wits about him, and at eight o'clock my brougham was not harnessed. The horse I prefer had to be shod, so I was forced to send for a cab."

"But, I suppose, you gave orders to your people to come for you?" said Courtenay.

"Oh! precise orders. The brougham is to be stationed at the corner of the Rue Halévy and the Boulevard Haussmann."

"Why so far away?"

"Because Max, my favourite, is a shy animal, and rather hard to manage. When he is in a file of carriages he won't keep in his place; and I prefer to walk a few steps rather than to expose him to the noise and bustle—especially when I have you to accompany me. He ought to be here already; but I am the worst-served woman in Paris, and I should not be astonished if my coachman was late."

"Would you like to have me go and see?" asked George.

"No," said Madame Bréhal, with a significant glance at Coulanges. "I prefer to keep you here, as I shall not remain till the end. I am a little fatigued, and I have a hundred things to do to-morrow morning. I shall leave after hearing the serenade of the third act."

"But I can go," exclaimed the doctor, who had understood Madame Bréhal's glance. "I saw your coachman to-day in the Champs-Élysées, and I shall recognise him easily."

"You saw my brougham also, and Max is a dark bay, with white socks."

"That is more information than I need. I will go and return in a few minutes. George won't be angry with me for leaving him with you."

George, indeed, made no objection to this arrangement, and Madame Bréhal thanked the doctor, who hastened out of the box.

He made up his mind to run to the Boulevard Haussmann, speak

to the coachman, and then search for M. de Pontaumur. But it was written above that the doctor should never do as he intended. He was in such a hurry to start on his expedition that he did not take his overcoat. The season permitted him, however, to show himself in evening dress in the streets adjoining the opera-house, and a gentleman whose place is on the grand tier does not promenade in the lounge with his overcoat on.

The doctor rapidly descended the staircase, and reached the exit without meeting the man whom he meant to look for on his return. He did not stop, but hastened along the Rue Halévy. A carriage was stationed quite alone, just where the Boulevard Haussmann crosses the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin—a carriage which he at first took for Madame Bréhal's. As he approached it, however, he perceived that he was mistaken. It was indeed a brougham, but the coachman wore a coat with three capes, and the horse was a sorrel.

"I could swear that that is the dark-green brougham which Pontaumur slipped into in the Champs-Élysées," thought Coulanges. "Yes, it is the same ; there are the wooden shutters. Oh, oh ! the mystery is becoming complicated. But this time I shall find out something, for I shall mount guard near this box of surprises."

He thought for a moment of questioning the coachman, but he very soon reflected that the man doubtless had orders to be silent, and that he would not be able to extract anything from him. It would be better to watch at a little distance, and this he decided to do. He then continued on his way, and at the end of the street he finally perceived another brougham, which was certainly Madame Bréhal's. Now was the time to fulfil his mission, and then he could return to post himself as a sentinel near the suspicious brougham. He passed the second carriage so as to examine it more closely, and make sure that he was not mistaken. The dark bay with the four white socks was there, and moreover the monogram G. B. appeared upon the door panel. The coachman, too, recognised him at once as the gentleman who had spoken to his mistress in the Champs-Élysées, and immediately assumed the classic pose of fashionable French drivers—the reins well gathered together in the left hand, the whip resting upright upon the right leg, and the eyes fixed upon the ears of the horse.

"I see that you are at your post," said Coulanges. "Madame Bréhal has sent me to tell you that she will be here in three-quarters of an hour."

"You may rely upon my not moving, sir," responded the coachman ; and, as he saw that the doctor was disposed to talk, he added : "I have no wish to have any accident. My horse is nervous, and he runs away for nothing. One can't do anything with him in the midst of carriages. I only drive him where there isn't much traffic about."

"Madame Bréhal was right not to let you wait in front of the opera house, then," said Coulanges.



"Madame would do much better to sell the horse, but she keeps him for his looks."

"Yes; he is not a bad-looking animal."

"But he is no good. The mare which I had this afternoon, when madame went to the Bois—ah! she's a different thing! But it needs a strong hand to hold this one; he drags this little brougham like a feather, and when he is in motion, you have to keep an eye on him all the time."

"He does appear shy."

"Shy? Why, five minutes before you came up, sir, a boy touched him as he passed; he gave such a jerk that my hands hurt me still. I should not dare to leave my box for an instant, for if he heard the crack of a whip, or a door suddenly shut, away he would go, like a shot."

"Indeed! This horse is a dangerous animal, then. Fortunately, you know how to manage him."

"Oh, as for that, I know my business."

The doctor, while talking, had not lost sight of the dark-green brougham drawn up some thirty paces behind. The two carriages were facing the same way, and Madame Bréhal's coachman could not see the other one. It was, therefore, useless to ask him if the mysterious brougham had been there for a long time or if any one had alighted from it. Besides, Coulanges thought he had talked long enough with a servant, and did not care to continue the conversation.

"I will tell Madame Bréhal that you are ready," he said, and he turned back towards the opera house.

He again passed quite close to the second carriage, the coachman of which seemed to be asleep, and paid no attention to him. However, as he reached the corner of the Rue Gluck, he saw, in the deserted Chaussée d'Antin, a man who had his back turned towards him, and who was talking with some one. The general appearance of this individual reminded him of the gentleman he was seeking, and he advanced a little so as to get a better view. It was indeed Pontaurmur, who was speaking to a fellow dressed in a long white blouse, and with a cap on his head.

This conference in the open street between a gentleman and a collector of cigar-stubs was eminently suspicious, and the first idea that occurred to Coulanges was to intervene unexpectedly, in order to surprise the conspirators. But this would no doubt be a mistake, and Coulanges, after due reflection, considered that it would be better to observe these people at a distance, see what they meant to do, follow them if they went off together, and finally accost Pontaurmur at the moment he separated from his strange companion.

"If I should interrupt their colloquy," he thought, with due reason, "Pontaurmur would have no difficulty in inventing an explanation, and I should not know how to justify such an abrupt intrusion into his affairs. He would perceive that I wish to dis-

cover his secrets, and then he would be on his guard with me. I shall learn more by contenting myself with a discreet surveillance, for he doesn't suspect that I am here, and he will act as if no one were noticing him."

This calculation proved a correct one. Pontaumur and the man accompanying him walked side by side towards the Boulevard Haussmann, without leaving the middle of the street or looking behind them. Coulanges, who followed them, keeping close to the houses, could observe them at his ease. The man in the blouse was of short stature; his head scarcely came to Pontaumur's shoulder; however, Pontaumur was nearly six feet high. They seemed to understand one another perfectly, and talked with animation, Pontaumur making repeated gestures. Coulanges even imagined that his gestures referred to the dark-green brougham, which could not be seen, but which was on the other side of the high buildings standing between the Rue Gluck and the Rue Halévy. Saulieu's adversary often raised his right hand and pointed in that direction, like a general, who, before the combat, points out the spot where the principal effort is to be made.

When they reached the end of the street, the two talkers turned and passed before the court-yard facing the pile in which the offices of the opera management are installed. This is a very crowded corner while performances are going on; the artistes enter and leave on this side, and their carriages here wait for them; the coachmen gather together upon the broad sidewalk, and the stage-carpenters come out and hurry into the wine-shops opposite. So the doctor hastened his steps, for fear of missing the couple he was chasing, Pontaumur and his companion having already disappeared behind a row of carriages. Coulanges only came up, however, just as Saulieu's enemy had stopped a passing cab.

The man in the blouse had turned back, and was advancing towards the doctor, whom he doubtless had not noticed. Pontaumur then entered the cab, and was driven away towards the Rue Scribe. Coulanges, who could not hope to catch him, stopped short, and stepped aside, so as to leave the passage free; the chief had escaped him, but he counted upon seeing the face of the subordinate. Unfortunately, the latter raised his eyes, and on perceiving the doctor, turned about and ran off as fast as his legs could carry him. Thus Coulanges had no time to see his face, and as he was in evening dress, without an overcoat, he did not attempt to pursue him. He remained where he was, very much annoyed by his failure, and somewhat disturbed by this odd incident.

M. de Pontaumur's intimacy with a street scavenger furnished him with abundant food for reflection; but he could not unravel the meaning of it. What could Maurice Saulieu's adversary have been plotting with this queer companion? Had he been scheming something against Madame Bréhal? That was impossible; in the heart of Paris, at ten o'clock in the evening, there is nothing to be feared

from violence. The doctor, understanding nothing, resolved to relieve himself of a part of his responsibility by telling Courtenay what he had seen and even all that he knew. The time for silence had gone by. It was necessary to put an end to the manœuvres of a band of rascals who were plotting in secret about Madame Bréhal, and it was only right to mention their conduct to the future husband of that charming woman.

Accordingly Coulanges hastened back to the opera house, and went in. The third act had been progressing for over a quarter of an hour, and only the box-openers were in the corridors. The one who had charge of Madame Bréhal's box conducted the doctor there, and Coulanges was no little surprised not to find George.

Madame Bréhal was alone, leaning forward to listen to the exquisite trio, "Balmy night;" and she was so much under the charm of the music that she did not turn at the slight noise made by the opening door. She made a sign with her fan for Coulanges to sit down without speaking, and he took good care not to open his mouth; however, he thought he might occupy the chair next her, which Courtenay's departure had left vacant.

As soon as the trio was over, Madame Bréhal said to him: "You will pardon me, will you not? I cannot hear that air without being deeply moved, and I love emotion. But it is over now. I am delighted to see you again, and we can talk until the serenade."

The doctor began by asking what had become of his friend.

"George has left me," answered the lady of the Avenue de Villiers, "to his great regret, but it could not be avoided."

"Why, what has happened for him to give up the pleasure of being near you?"

"Oh! nothing serious. His notary, knowing, I don't know how, that he was at the opera in my box, sent him a letter to ask him to come to him immediately."

"That is very singular. At this hour, notaries are usually a-bed, or, if not, at all events they do not bother themselves after dinner about the business of their clients. There is no question yet of signing the contract."

"Unfortunately, no," said Madame Bréhal, smiling. "But until that happy evening comes we must think a little of the happiness of others. George thought that the notary, perhaps, had some important communication to make in regard to his friend's will. I thought so also, and I advised him to go at once. You know that this will has made Mademoiselle Mezenc Saulieu's sole legatee, and that she refuses to profit by it; who knows if the notary has not found a means of persuading her to accept?"

"Do you think that he is so much interested in her as that?"

"He does not know her, but he knows that she was to marry George's friend, and George is one of his best clients."

"Notaries are not so zealous usually. But we shall soon know, for George will return, I suppose."

"No, for the notary lives in the Rue de Babylone, at the end of the Faubourg Saint-Germain. It is quite a journey, and, as I wish to return home early, I shall rely upon you to accompany me to my carriage."

"I am at your orders, madame."

"George asked me to tell you that he should go to the club and wait for you there, even if you wished to remain here until the end of the performance."

"I shall join him, certainly, but I shall not return here after your departure. Without you, madame, the opera will have no charm for me."

"Am I to take that declaration as an avowal of musical indifference, or as a compliment to myself?"

"In the latter case it would be a clumsy one. I simply told you the truth. I always make the mistake of not disguising my thoughts."

"Mistake! It is an excellent quality, and upon that point, as upon all others, we agree perfectly well. Do you know, doctor, I rely upon you to help George to bear a change of life for which he is little prepared? Our marriage was decided upon so quickly."

"George is the happiest of men, and I assure you, madame, that he will never regret his intentions."

"I hope not. But, after the wedding journey, we shall reside in my house in the Avenue de Villiers, and we shall be lonely if you abandon us, for I intend to restrict the circle of my ordinary acquaintances. Society has no more attraction for me, and one or two friends will amply suffice."

"I shall be very proud to be one of those friends, and that hope alone would strengthen my determination to remain a bachelor."

"I understand; that is a warning; but have no fear; I solemnly promise not to attempt anything against your liberty, and I even acknowledge that I made a mistake in trying to find a wife for you. You are not ready for marriage."

"And I think I never shall be."

"The 'Serenade' will be sung in a few moments, and then we will go. I suppose you found my coachman all right?"

"Yes, quite so, madame. He is at his post, at the end of the Rue Halévy. I even spoke to him, and he told me of his uneasiness about the dark bay."

"My coachman is a coward, and my dark bay is a dear. Every time I ride behind him, he gives me a slight sensation of fear, which I delight in."

"But if he happened to run away, my dear madame?"

"If he ran away I should not lose my head. He has already played me that trick once or twice, and I did not stir."

"That was brave on your part, but carriage accidents are often serious."

"Well, if one befalls me, you shall cure me. For I have pro-

moted you, without your permission, to the post of physician in ordinary to Madame George Courtenay."

"You do me too much honour. I practice so little that I have almost forgotten all I knew. So I hope that you will never need my science."

"I am wonderfully well, but whatever may happen, I shall have faith in you, doctor, and I shall never call in any one else if I be taken ill. So consider yourself appointed."

"Oh! I do not refuse, but——"

"Not a word more, please. The 'Serenade' is commencing. I am going to listen."

Coulanges could not do less than listen also—that is, relapse into silence, although his imagination was very much excited. Pontau-mur's manœuvres never left his mind, and George's absence worried him. He did not at all believe in this summons from the notary, and he wondered if Courtenay had invented it as a pretext to leave, or if this strange delivery of a letter were only some machination on the part of his enemies to entice him away from the theatre.

This last supposition was, in point of fact, the only one which the doctor admitted, for George was too much in love to feel bored near Madame Bréhal. What moved Coulanges was that he was obliged to hide from the lady his suppositions and fears. Madame Bréhal, knowing nothing of the situation, was in no position to be enlightened. What would be the use of troubling her by informing her of what was taking place about her? It would be much better to protect her as she went out, and then to hasten to the club, where George would certainly repair.

"Once there, I will have an explanation with him," thought Coulanges, "and I won't conceal anything. The time has come to act."

The "Serenade" was sung in a manner to make one regret that famous vocalist, Faure, who sung this delicious air so well; however, Madame Bréhal loved Mozart for himself, and listened with passionate attention. When the *aria* was over, the doctor saw that her eyes were full of tears.

"Let us go," said she, "that 'Serenade' always makes my heart beat. It seems to me that George is singing it to me, and I long to appear on my balcony. But I am saying foolish things, and it is time you took me away."

The doctor was of the same opinion, and hastened to open the door of the box; he helped Madame Bréhal to put on her cloak and offered her his arm. The act was not over, so that the corridors were deserted, and the grand staircase lacked the brilliant aspect which it has at the close of the performance, when silks and laces trail over the marble steps, and it takes one ten minutes to descend. In the vestibule, there was nobody, save here and there a footman, waiting for his master's arrival, while outside there were a few spectators who were *blasés* in regard to music, and who preferred to

smoke a cigar in the open air rather than to hear the statue of the commander accept Don Juan's invitation. Pontaurmur was not among them.

"What a beautiful evening!" said Madame Bréhal, leaning upon Coulanges' arm. "It is delightful to breathe the air under that starry sky. If George were with us, I should propose a drive to the cascade in the Bois de Boulogne."

"Your physician in ordinary would forbid it," responded Coulanges. "Night so cool, ah! night serene," is a charming air to sing in Spain, but, in Paris, in the spring, one may catch cold."

"And, besides, George has made an appointment with you, doctor; so take me quickly to my carriage and regain your liberty."

Coulanges asked nothing better. As they walked past the balustrade beside the opera house, he glanced up the Rue Halévy, and saw with no little satisfaction that the dark-green brougham was no longer there. That brougham always gave him the idea of a machine of war with enemies hidden within it, as in the case of the Homeric horse of Troy.

On the other hand, Madame Bréhal's carriage had not moved, and this would prove a sure asylum, a refuge against all attacks.

"You see that Max hasn't stirred," said Madame Bréhal. "He is a much-slandered animal."

"He seems to me terribly impatient," muttered Coulanges.

This was true. Max was stamping his feet, and the sparks flew from under his hoofs; while the coachman, erect upon his box, seemed to have great difficulty in holding him.

Coulanges judged that it was time to calm the fractious dark bay by a smart trot to the Avenue de Villiers, and he hurried as much as he could without disturbing his companion. They were not ten feet from the brougham, when he noticed a white form against the dark background of the houses—the figure of some one who was only separated from Max by the width of the sidewalk.

Madame Bréhal had perceived this person also, for she exclaimed: "Do you know why Max is so uneasy? There is a man standing there near him. Max is like a well-bred dog; he does not allow ragged people to approach him. My coachman, who knows his character, ought to have changed his place."

"I am not at all sure that that fellow in the blouse would not have followed him," replied Coulanges. "He has been loafing about your carriage before, this evening; your coachman told me so."

"Do you think he has any evil designs? You seem uneasy."

"No—but I wonder what he can be doing here."

"He is some poor fellow who is watching for an opportunity of earning a few sous by opening the door."

"I fear that he is watching for something else, but I will take care to prevent his doing any harm."

"If I were timid, my dear doctor, you would end by alarming me. But I feel all the more tranquil, as I have no enemies."

"One always has some enemies," murmured George's friend, who could now distinguish the man more easily—it was the same young fellow whom he had surprised, half an hour previously, talking with M. de Pontaurmur. There was no doubt but what it was the same person, and this time he stood motionless in the recess of a door-way. He evidently had some object in taking his position there, so near the blue brougham. He was waiting for Madame Bréhal, and he knew very well that the coachman could not leave his box to drive him away, on account of Max's temper ; moreover, he took good care to keep out of the reach of the whip.

"He will bolt when he sees me," thought the doctor ; but, on the contrary, the man stood firm.

Coulanges would have liked to catch him by the collar, but he could not desert Madame Bréhal.

"Don't you see that it is a boy?" she whispered. "How he would laugh at us, if he suspected that he had frightened us for a moment, but he cannot be thinking of us."

The doctor did not try to prove the contrary to the future Madame Courtenay. He had conceived a plan, the execution of which seemed easy to him, a plan which consisted in falling upon this suspicious character as soon as the brougham had started off.

"Would you please get in at once, madame?" said the coachman. "It would be as well, for the horse is very restive."

"I shall see you soon, my dear doctor," said Madame Bréhal, with a frank shake of the hand. "Remind George that I shall expect him to-morrow, and come and dine with us, if you don't fear to be bored by two lovers."

Coulanges did not answer. He was longing to attack the young man in the blouse, who had not stirred. He opened the carriage door, helped Madame Bréhal in, and turned to give the coachman his orders, when suddenly he saw the young fellow in the door-way clear the breadth of the sidewalk in three bounds, and jump at the head of the dark bay.

What then took place did not last as long as it will take to relate it. Coulanges instantly closed the door and dashed upon the strange assailant who had dared to lay his hand upon Max, and, at the same moment, the coachman aimed a blow at the rascal.

Whether the lash touched Max's ears or the noise of the violently-closed door frightened him, at all events the nervous animal started off at a breakneck pace. The doctor was in no position to stop him, so he only thought of seizing the culprit.

"Ah ! you scoundrel !" he cried. "I have you at last !"

But he had not captured him at all. The fellow had taken to his heels and was running away at full speed. Coulanges bravely started after him, but not before he had lost some seconds in gazing after the horse which bore Madame Bréhal away at a frantic gallop. The doctor saw the coachman adroitly avoid the so-called "refuges" placed for the security of foot-passengers and for the

perdition of carriages at a point where six broad streets meet, and after passing these refuges the driver guided Max towards the longest and straightest of the six, which is the Rue Lafayette.

"Max has run away, that is clear," thought Coulanges, "but he has space before him and he will finally calm down, if he doesn't strike against anything."

Meanwhile the fugitive had taken the opposite side of the street, and the doctor's hesitation, short as it had been, had given him time to gain some distance. He ran like a deer up the Boulevard Haussmann, and he had almost reached the Rue Mogador, when suddenly the doctor, still behind, espied the green brougham.

That accursed vehicle was stationed there, and Coulanges immediately understood that Pontaumur's agent was again about to escape him; indeed the carriage door was already open to receive him.

"Stop thief!" cried the doctor, realising that he was distanced.

Unfortunately, there were but few passers-by. One or two turned, but they did not understand, and before one of them thought of barring the young fellow's way, the latter leaped into the carriage, which started off, and disappeared in the twinkling of an eye.

Coulanges, in his exasperation, could willingly have struck the fools who had not acted in accordance with his call; but he soon recovered his self-possession, and realised that it would be as ridiculous to complain as to follow the green brougham on foot. It would be much better to turn back and try to find out what had become of Madame Bréhal, and this he did.

He knew the truth only too soon.

When he reached the open space where the Rue Lafayette commences, he perceived, almost at the entrance of the street, and upon the left hand side, a large crowd, which appeared to him of very bad augury. The doctor was of the opinion of Alfred de Musset, who remarked, "that in nine cases out of ten a crowd only assembled when some misfortune had happened." And he was right, for the mad gallop of the dark bay had ended in a catastrophe at less than a hundred yards from the place where he had started.

There is a vacant space between the Rue Lafayette and the Cité d'Antin, and in the middle of this vacant space stands a sort of little monument, which one would take for a fountain, but which is really only an ornamental construction of brick and stone.

On reaching this spot the coachman, to avoid coming into collision with a large omnibus, had been obliged to turn Max to the left. Unfortunately he was no longer master of his horse, and the furious animal dashed against the first obstacle he met with.

The crowd, which the accident had attracted, made way for Coulanges when they knew he was a doctor, and our friend beheld the horse extended on his flank, the brougham shattered, and the coachman scated upon the pavement and supported by two men. However, he did not stop to contemplate these disasters; he was seeking for Madame Bréhal, and he found her a little further on,



lying upon a cushion which had been taken out of the carriage, her head resting against the base of the edifice against which Max had met his death. The doctor's heart stopped beating for an instant, for he thought that she was dead, she was so pale; however, she had already recovered consciousness, and was heroically forcing herself to smile :

"Is it you, my dear doctor?" she said. "Ah ! I knew you would come to my rescue."

"I hope that you are not seriously hurt !" faltered Coulanges, more moved even than she was.

"I think that both my legs are broken."

"That will be nothing. Is there no cut on the head or about the breast?"

"No. At least, I don't feel any pain."

"Then you can bear removal, and I——"

"I have sent for a stretcher," now interrupted a policeman.

As Coulanges was about to protest, Madame Bréhal gently said : "It was right, for I could not enter a carriage, and you cannot examine me here. While we are waiting, will you have the kindness to see if my poor coachman is not in a worse plight than I am?"

"No, madame, no," said the policeman. "They say he has only lost his head. By Jove ! I can understand it ; he must have been frightened to death. But he is coming round, and he will be able to walk in a quarter of an hour."

"Thanks," responded Madame Bréhal, with astonishing coolness. "But no matter ; go and examine him, doctor, at once."

"Since you wish it, I will go," said Coulanges, admiring her courage and kindness of heart.

The coachman was, in fact, wandering a little. To all the doctor's questions he merely responded with incoherent sentences : "The knave ! the brigand ! I knew very well what he wanted with my horse—it was he who caused the trouble—the ear—he touched Max's ear—he put something in it."

"He doesn't know what he is talking about," said one of the men who were supporting the coachman.

Coulanges, however, was not of this opinion, for he understood what the words meant.

"I ought to have broken his head with the butt of my whip," continued the coachman, "still he will bear my marks. I lashed him across the face."

"That is a good thing to remember," thought Coulanges. And he said aloud : "Be calm, my good fellow, be calm ; you have nothing broken, and you will be taken home. I shall remain to accompany your mistress, but I shall see you again, and make a thorough examination."

With this promise, the doctor hastily returned to Madame Bréhal, and he did not see the coachman stoop over to pick up something which he had noticed lying between two paving-stones.

## X.

IN leaving Madame Bréhal, Courtenay had complied with a very praiseworthy sentiment. He did not exactly understand the letter which had summoned him to the Rue de Babylone, but he thought himself bound not to neglect anything calculated to assure the execution of his unfortunate friend Saulieu's last wishes. And there was all the more merit in his acting in this way, as he was only moderately interested in Maurice's heiress. The letter was not in the notary's handwriting, but in that of one of his clerks, and this clerk did not sign legibly, for George could not decipher his name. However, the paper bore the usual printed business heading, and there did not seem to be any doubt as to the authenticity of the summons.

If Courtenay had taken time to reflect, however, he would have wondered how the notary knew the number of Madame Bréhal's box. The box-opener, in giving him the note, had said that an employé of the theatre had brought it to her, after receiving it from the hands of a messenger. The address was as clear and explicit as possible: "Monsieur George Courtenay. Madame Bréhal's Box. First Tier, No. 8. Right Side." And the word "Urgent" was written in the corner.

The idea of there being anything wrong never entered George's head, and after a short but loving conversation with Madame Bréhal, who announced her intention of returning home early, he left the opera house and took a cab, which in half-an-hour's time brought him to the Rue de Babylone. There George found a crowd of carriages before the door of the house where he was awaited, and, on raising his eyes, he saw that the windows of his notary's flat were brilliantly lighted up. A party of some sort was evidently being given there, and something of great importance must have happened for the notary to devote any time that evening to the interests of his clients.

George entered, and, as he was in full evening dress, the servants took him for an invited guest. He told them that he wished to speak to their master, but they did not understand him, and ushered him into the presence of the mistress of the house, who was surrounded by numerous friends.

Courtenay had met her once or twice, and he was obliged to go forward and pay his respects. This politeness drew from the lady an avalanche of disjointed sentences, in which compliments and apologies were inextricably mingled. She thanked him for having

come, and asked his pardon for not having invited him, alleging as an excuse that the party was, in a certain sense, a professional one. The notary had given a dinner to several of his colleagues, and almost all the people present were in some way connected with the legal professions. However, she hoped to make amends very soon, and she trusted that Madame Bréhal, after she had become Madame Courtenay, would embellish a ball given in her honour with her presence.

George, to curtail this torrent of apologies and promises, did not deem it fit to explain the reason of his presence. This would have furnished new food for a conversation which annoyed him. He preferred to reply with some phrases such as ordinary courtesy dictates, and, as soon as he could, he beat a retreat to search for the notary.

He found him in another room, seated at a whist table, and, to his great surprise, he only obtained a smile from him, whereas he had expected that the man of the law would leave his game at once and come to him. This indifference passed all bounds, and Courtenay had just decided to ask him to rise, when he saw that the rubber was ended. Others cut in, and the notary gave up his place. However, George's surprise changed to bewilderment when he heard the master of the house repeat his wife's apologies. This time he did not hesitate to interrupt his legal adviser, and he exclaimed: "Shall we go into your study? I can there hear the communication which you have to make to me, and then you can return to your guests."

"The communication? But I have nothing new to tell you," said the notary. "My head clerk is occupied in preparing the contract, and——"

"It was not about the contract that I came, but about Maurice Saulieu's will. I have your letter here——"

"What letter?"

"The one I received at the opera."

"I have not written to you since yesterday, my dear sir."

"But some one has written in your name. Look!"

The notary took the letter which George drew from his pocket, but he had scarcely glanced at it, when he exclaimed: "This is a joke, my dear sir, a wicked practical joke."

"Then, it was not one of your clerks who signed this?"

"My clerks would not dare to play such a trick on one of my best clients. This letter is the work of some practical joker."

"I begin to think so, but I cannot understand the object of it."

"Nor I either. April-fool's-day is past, and I cannot understand it, unless some one had an interest in drawing you away from the theatre where you were, with Madame Bréhal perhaps."

"Yes, with her, and certainly I would gladly have remained there. But this does not explain to me why——"

"It explains nothing. And what is the strangest part of this singular affair is that the anonymous writer, who has played this bad joke, must have known that Saulieu's will had been sent to me."

"I am very much inclined to think that the letter and will were sent by the same person."

"Possibly, but——"

"How are you progressing as regards the heiress?"

"We are still at the same point. I wrote to her to inform her of her inheritance, and to ask her to call at my office. But she did not come, and, indeed, she has not taken the trouble to answer me."

"Then you don't know whether she has filed a regular renunciation of the legacy?"

"If she had done so, I should have been informed of it, and that is why I am sure that there can be no change in the situation. I may say that I should not be very much surprised if she ended by quietly accepting the bequest. A person does not give up twenty thousand francs a-year for nothing."

"I agree with you on that point. But I care very little as to what Mademoiselle Mezenc does. The point that interests me is that my marriage with Madame Bréhal should not be delayed by the manœuvres of my enemies or hers, and what has happened to me this evening is a warning. I shall be on my guard hereafter. It would be as well, in the first place, that Madame Bréhal should know of this, and I shall join her without losing a moment."

The notary urged his client to stay, but George had no desire to remain at this gathering of serious-looking men and over-dressed women. He went off, after hastily taking leave of the mistress of the house, and re-entered his cab, which he had left at the door.

He hoped to find Madame Bréhal still at the opera, but the two journeys—coming and going—and the chat with the notary and the notary's wife, had occupied fully an hour and a quarter, so that, when he reached Madame Bréhal's box, he found no one there. He was greatly annoyed at this, for he wished to tell her of his expedition, and ask her to whom she ascribed the despatch of this evidently malicious letter. However, he could scarcely venture to go to her house and consult her at such an hour, and, besides, he did not feel the slightest uneasiness on her account; moreover, he knew that she must have gone off with Coulanges, who would be a sufficient protection, and whom he would soon meet at the club.

He started off from the opera house, smoking a cigar, and, as he walked down the boulevard, he heard some people standing at the corner of the Chaussée d'Antin speak of a carriage accident which had taken place not far from there; however, it never entered his head to connect these remarks with Madame Bréhal's brougham.

Paris is so constituted that one passes close to catastrophes without thinking anything about them, and a husband may see a body borne along on a stretcher without suspecting it is that of his wife.

For his part, Courtenay was absorbed in thinking of the disagreeable experience he had just passed through, and he made up his mind to discover the author of the letter, which he had kept. He hoped that chance would furnish him with an opportunity to

recognise the handwriting, by comparing it with that of the persons whom he suspected were plotting against his peace ; and he naturally intended to commence by showing the missive to Dr. Coulanges, who had already given sundry proofs of his sagacity.

With this resolve Courtenay entered the club a little before midnight, and was considerably astonished not to find his friend there. It was in vain that he explored all the rooms, he could not discover Coulanges, though the latter ought to have arrived before him, presuming that he had only conducted Madame Bréhal to her carriage.

He did not suppose for a single instant that he had accompanied her to the Avenue de Villiers, and he mentally accused him of having gone off to supper somewhere. He knew the doctor's habits, and he thought him quite capable of wandering off, after the opera, to the Restaurant du Helder, or the Café Americain ; however, he was in no humour to go and look for him there, and he decided to wait at the club, for he knew very well that Coulanges would not go so far as to let a gay supper make him forget that he had an appointment with an intimate friend.

Courtenay, moreover, had not the least desire to go to sleep, and he considered that he would have no trouble in whiling away an hour or two, for there were plenty of persons to talk to, and he was not an enemy to card-playing if he found a party to his liking.

He had wandered into the red saloon, when he was abruptly accosted by a gentleman whom he held in great esteem, and whom he always liked to meet, although there was a great difference in their ages.

"My dear sir," said this person, who was called the Count de Saint-Senier, "I was looking for you to ask your advice in regard to a painful but necessary proceeding which has to be taken against one of the members of the club."

The "Mouchérons" is not one of those clubs which are governed by direct universal suffrage ; it is managed by a committee, elected by all the members, who thus delegate their sovereign authority. This committee, renewable each year, decides upon the admission of candidates and, in cases of necessity, upon the expulsion of black sheep. Courtenay had formerly been a member of the committee, and when his term expired, M. de Saint-Senier had taken his place. It was quite natural, therefore, that this gentleman should consult him in a delicate case, and he could not dispense with giving his advice, although, for some time past, he had not been very much interested in the management of the club.

"It is, no doubt, a question of posting some gaming debt not paid within the proper time," he said. "For my part, I find the rule a little too severe, and I think that it should only be applied to men who are manifestly dishonest. To post a good fellow who has always paid up regularly, and who, for once, has been led on to lose

more than he can pay the next day, or even in two or three days, strikes me as rather hard, my dear count."

"You have the right to be indulgent, because you yourself are faultless," answered Monsieur de Saint-Senier. "And, moreover, I agree with you, that before resorting to extreme measures, the moral standing of the delinquents ought to be taken into consideration. But the question before us is a much graver one."

"Really? What is it, then?"

"A member of the club has been denounced to the committee for playing dishonestly at cards."

"What! There is cheating going on here, then?"

"The fact has not been proved up to the present, but some one has been accused."

"Of pre-arranging the cards, or using marked ones?"

"Not positively; no one has seen him; but it is stated that he does not stake his money in a proper way. He pushes his stakes forward or withdraws them according as to whether he meets with good or bad luck."

"Well, in that case, there can be no cause for hesitation. The man who ventures to indulge in such irregular play is a rascal, who should be pitilessly driven from the society of decent men."

"I agree with you, if he is caught in the act, and if any one will denounce him openly. But, in such cases, no one cares to do so."

"I would, I assure you, if I perceived him at his tricks; and I cannot conceive how any one could act otherwise. To be silent is equivalent to becoming the accomplice of a knave, since silence insures his impunity. The duty of every honest man is to prevent him continuing his practices."

"All that is very true, but I think we are all interested in avoiding a scandal."

"What! you would tolerate such conduct?"

"No, certainly not; but we are seeking a means of putting an end to it, without creating any disturbance, and I think that we are right, for this reason. A great outcry is being made just now against clubs. Certain newspapers do not hesitate to call all clubs gambling hells, and it must be acknowledged that, as regards some places, the qualification is deserved."

"The bad practices prevailing in other clubs do not affect us."

"It is certain that we have never had any scandalous stories here, and it is precisely because we are immaculate that we desire to keep our robes of innocence spotless. If it should be known to-morrow that a man had been caught cheating at the Mouchérons, what would people say? The so-called clubs where this kind of thing happens at least once every year would be the first to deride us. The affair would be known all over Paris, and commented upon, to the great detriment of our good name."

"That is possible, but it is not so bad as harbouring a thief among us. Between two evils, we must choose the least."

"Unless we can succeed in avoiding them both."

"By what process?"

"I have thought of a plan which I should like to submit to you. It seems to me that it would be sufficient to warn the culprit. If, for instance, during a game, a letter were brought to him, containing these words: 'Cease these practices. You are detected,' or something like that, I think that he would leave the table at once and never return."

"I am not so sure of it. A fellow of that kind might not take any notice of an anonymous warning, for I don't suppose that the committee would sign this missive."

"No. The committee has delegated its powers to Becherel and myself. We are appointed to investigate the matter secretly, and to bring it to an issue, without any fuss—that is, if possible. But if this person, after being warned, has the impudence to return to the club, we have resolved to give orders to have him forbidden to enter, and, if he asks for any explanations, we shall be there to answer him."

"Yes, that is feasible; although, on principle, I do not like anonymous letters. But, supposing he pays no attention to the written communication, what then?"

"He will pay due attention to it. I have observed him for a long time, and I am sure that he will quietly disappear. It is in his nature to do so."

This response made Courtenay think that it might be some one he knew. "I do not ask his name," he said.

"And I cannot tell it to you, because we have agreed not to tell any one. As you know, the members of the committee have their professional secrets as well as physicians. But it will be very easy for you to know the name, now that I have told you of the case, and you approve of our method of action. You have only to be present when the accused person receives the notification."

"When will that be?"

"The letter is quite ready. And as he has no suspicion of what is in store for him, I think that he will come to-night, and sit down as usual at the baccarat table. Perhaps he is there already. I am going to see, for we must not defer this matter. In such cases, all delay is to be avoided. Be present at the game, if it amuses you; stake some money even, if you feel in the mood, but do not think of acting as banker, for you would have to deal with a cheat, and, to strike the great blow, we shall wait until he begins his trickery. Now, he is a clever fellow, and you would see nothing, but we, who know who he is, are going to watch, and we shall act at the proper moment. Till by-and-by. Not a word, you understand."

"Of course. I shall keep my eyes open, but I shall say nothing."

M. de Saint-Senier walked away, leaving Courtenay considerably perplexed. Our friend particularly wished to find out if a suspicion which had come to him was well founded, but he also par-

ticularly wanted to talk to his friend Coulanges, and he feared that he might miss him. Baccarat was played in an out-of-the-way room, and he feared that the doctor would not think of coming there. "Half-past twelve!" he mused. "Where can the fellow be? Eating, probably, at some restaurant. If he had felt sleepy he would have come here first, and have left word for me not to wait for him. However, apparently no one has seen him; so he may arrive at any time, and I must remain. I may as well pass the time in watching the scene which is to take place in the baccarat room."

Courtenay thereupon rang and instructed the servant who came to him to tell Dr. Coulanges, when he arrived, where he would be, and that he wished to speak to him at once.

Easy on this score, George bent his steps toward the room where the disciples of "luck" were gathered together. The game was in full progress, and it was almost an event that the players should be so numerous, for baccarat had been in a languishing condition for some time past. The bankers had been so lucky for a long while that they had no longer found willing antagonists. However, on this particular evening, without knowing why, many former players had assembled in view of trying to win back their money. All varieties of superstitions were represented about the green baize-covered table. There were men who believed in the influence of a little pig worn as a charm; others who held in their mouths an extinguished cigar, which they did not dare to light for fear of spoiling their luck. Some, too, had wandered for a long time about the boulevards, in the hope of meeting a hump-back, and touching his hump.

All the faces were familiar to Courtenay, and one alone attracted his attention in any marked degree—that of M. Corléon, who was playing at the end of the table, and with success; for he had before him a large pile of counters of twenty and one hundred francs each, easily recognisable by their form and colour. The banker was a capitalist, who was celebrated for his large and constant winnings, and who inspired timid players with salutary terror. Few of them took part in the game when he dealt the cards, and as he was detested because of his persistent luck, many evil things were said about him.

Courtenay, who had heard some of these remarks exchanged after games which had proved disastrous to the punters, wondered if this were the gentleman whom the committee wished discreetly to expel. That evening, however, this great conqueror, to the general surprise, had lost a deal of money, but he did not seem particularly disturbed by it. M. de Saint-Senier stood behind the seats of some of the players, and did not appear to observe one more than another.

"I am afraid that the letter will not be delivered to-night," thought Courtenay, who had for a moment fancied that the culprit would prove to be M. Corléon.



The last deal was lost by the banker, and it proved a heavy loss ; for it took away at least a quarter of the sum lying before him. He paid every one their dues, however, without a word of complaint.

Courtenay, who was attentively watching the game, saw M. Corléon carelessly rake in a large sum. This fortunate player had pushed a pile of counters forward without counting them. With a careless touch, he knocked the pile over, saying, "I don't know how much there is there;" and it was found that there were four counters of a hundred francs each, and twelve of twenty, in all thirty-two louis, which he received in gold and notes.

All this was perfectly regular on both sides, and Courtenay made up his mind that neither of these gentlemen was the culprit ; he almost reproached himself for having suspected them. The banker showed no desire to rise. He had had a run of ill-luck, but he wished to recoup himself by continuing to deal.

The cards which, after each deal, had been cast into a sort of pocket in the middle of the long table, were now gathered up, and, during this enforced pause, the players conversed among themselves. Of course, they did not talk of politics, literature, or women, for card-players can never talk on any subject save the game. They gravely discussed the eternal question of calling for a fresh card when one has five points in hand, a practice approved of by the school of Bordeaux, the birthplace of baccarat ; but blamed by the school of Paris, whose opinion has prevailed in modern times. One player demonstrated to his neighbour that the banker did right to stop when he had but three points, if he has given nine to either side. As for the unlucky players they exchanged bitter words in regard to that capricious deity, Luck, and growled against those who had won their money.

In the midst of the general hubbub, M. Corléon retained his coolness, and even his gaiety, for he joked pleasantly with any one who cared to talk to him. The Count de Saint-Sénier now went away, no doubt to speak to M. Becherel, his colleague, who was to assist him in carrying out the decision of the committee.

Courtenay concluded that the culprit was not present, and he began to worry himself again about the unpunctual doctor. Still he remained in the room, having no better way of killing time than to watch the game. The banker, having shuffled the cards, asked him to cut them, and he did not refuse to render him this service, which is usually asked of people who are supposed to bring good luck. Courtenay was one of these, and the punters cursed him in their hearts, for at the first deal the banker announced nine points.

There was a general raking in of the stakes, and the counters piled up by M. Corléon were also destined to swell the banker's winnings, but Corléon, who had manipulated them before the cards were dealt, announced merely fifteen louis, and drew three one hundred franc notes from his pocket, saying :

"I prefer to pay in paper. It is a superstition of mine."

And as all present were more or less superstitious, no one was astonished by this declaration.

M. Corléon displayed, moreover, the prudence of a serpent ; for after this loss he remained for several deals without playing.

It was as well that he did so, for not one of the punters won. There was a formidable run of luck against them, and they were all the more enraged at Courtenay, who had cut, but did not play. They cast angry glances at him, while the banker gave him a pleasant smile. George, therefore, determined to show the unlucky ones that he did not share their ridiculous ideas, and, taking out a thousand franc note, he cast it upon the right side of the table.

On seeing this, the victor made a grimace, the vanquished looked up, and Monsieur Corléon raised a new pile of counters upon the *débris* of the one he had overturned, after paying in money ; he took great care to raise this pile in the form of a pyramid, placing the larger counters at the bottom and the smaller ones at the top. On the side on which Courtenay and Corléon had staked the hand was held by a young man who had recently arrived in Paris—the one who had been beaten the evening before at billiards. He was absolutely deficient in coolness ; and when he had glanced at his hand, and the banker asked him if he would have any cards, he replied : “Yes,” although he held six points. Monsieur Corléon could willingly have strangled him, but he restrained his anger, and even forced himself to smile. The others had seen the error, and their faces grew long.

The banker divined that his adversary had made a mistake, and he determined to profit by it. The hand on the left stood at eight, but there were fewer stakes on that side than on the other. The thing was to beat the hand on the right, and the banker felt no uneasiness, as he held seven.

Unfortunately for him, however, he dealt a three, which gave the young man the triumphant point of nine, and the poor fellow's delight was such that he threw his cards face upwards on the table. There was an explosion of reproaches against him for thus exposing his hand.

The banker then drew a card, which was also a three. “Baccarat !” he exclaimed, throwing his hand away. Then everything changed. The punters praised the young fellow whom they had just blamed : he had won when a more skilful player would certainly have lost by standing at six.

The only course open to the defeated banker was to pay, and he proceeded to do so with a very good grace. Courtenay pocketed a thousand francs, which he had scarcely expected, and when it came Monsieur Corléon's turn, the banker, who had remembered the amount of his stakes on the last occasion, exclaimed :

“Fifteen louis, eh ?”

“Excuse me,” answered Corléon ; “I think there is more. I will count my pile.”

He did so, and found that the counters represented exactly forty-five louis. The banker, this time also, paid without making any objection.

Courtenay was no longer thinking of the lucky player who lost when he staked a small sum and won when he risked a large amount. He did not even notice that M. de Saint-Senier had quitted the room, and that his colleague was now on guard near the table. The funds in the bank were reduced, but the bank was not broken, and so the game continued. George, satisfied with having given a lesson to the gentlemen who accused him of bringing them ill luck, did not play any further. M. Corléon also ceased playing, and appeared very much absorbed in the construction of a new pile of counters, which he intended to push forward when the inspiration came to him to try his luck again.

At this moment Courtenay, who was a little distance from the table, saw one of the club servants enter the room, bearing a silver salver, on which a large square-shaped letter was lying.

"Ah!" he thought, "that servant, without knowing it, must be the executor of the committee's decision. Whom can the letter be intended for?"

The liveried messenger seemed to be looking among the players for the person to whom the sealed envelope was directed. The banker was about to deal the cards, and M. Corléon had already pushed his pile forward, when the servant approached him and very respectfully presented the salver.

"Look!" said one facetious player, "there is Corléon receiving a love letter in the midst of a game of baccarat."

The Italian forced a smile as he opened the letter.

"My dear fellow," continued the joker, "you ought really to tell the ladies not to disturb you while you are at play. There is a time for everything."

Courtenay was watching with all his eyes, and he was repaid for his pains. Corléon had scarcely unfolded the sheet of paper contained in the envelope than his face changed.

"You turn pale, my lord!" cried the joker, imitating the voice of a melodramatic actor. "I'll bet that your sweetheart has deserted you."

"Silence!" growled a nervous player. "I can't hear myself think."

"Well, sir, do you play or not?" asked the banker.

"No, not this time," muttered Corléon, drawing back his counters.

"Ah! it is certainly he," thought Courtenay. "Monsieur de Pontaurmur is the friend of a sharper. Let us see what he is going to do."

Corléon did nothing. He abstained from playing, and did not leave his seat. At this moment a hand was placed upon Courtenay's shoulder, and, on turning, he found himself face to face with the doctor.

"Ah! at last!" he cried. "I have been waiting more than two hours for you. Where the devil have you been?"

"Not so loud," murmured Coulanges. "I will explain to you why I am late, but it is better that no one should hear what I have to tell you. Come with me into the little room close by; there is no one there at present, and we can talk at our ease."

"Very willingly, in a few minutes."

"Are you playing?"

"No, but I want to see the end of a scene, the beginning of which I have just witnessed. Let us draw aside a little, and I will tell you what has taken place."

Coulanges followed George into the recess of a window, where the players could not hear them. The gay doctor did not seem the same as usual; his eyes did not sparkle with mirth, as was customary; and his lips did not wear that Rabelaisian smile which became him so well. He was pale, and had the worn-out look of a man who has passed his night in bad company, or who has left all his money upon the green table of some gambling hell.

"What is the matter with you, old fellow?" asked Courtenay. "You don't look well."

"I am tired," answered Coulanges, sadly.

"Have you been drinking a little too much?"

"No, no; and when you know where I come from you will have no desire to jest, I assure you."

"Ah! at last, he has decided to leave," muttered George, who was not listening with any great amount of attention to Coulanges' words.

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of a fellow whom you know very well. Look over there, at the end of the table."

"Corléon? Yes, he is pocketing his money and his counters, I see. He has, no doubt, won enough, and he is going away. Is there anything surprising in that?"

"He is going, because he has been ordered to do so. He has received a letter telling him that his cheating practices have been discovered, and that he must cease to play, under penalty of being publicly expelled."

"Did you see him cheat?"

"Yes. I must say, however, that if I had not been told about it, I should not have discovered the process he employs. It is as simple as possible, however. He adds counters to his pile when he wins, and takes some away from it when he loses. This was reported to the committee, and he has been caught in the act."

"It isn't the first time he has cheated, I'm sure," said Coulanges, in an undertone.

"Well, he is dishonoured this time, and I haven't lost my evening, since I have been present at his execution. It was accomplished without any noise, but it will soon be known to everybody. It will

serve us as a preliminary move before beginning a campaign against Pontaurmur. Corléon is his other self. I will prove it."

"I also will prove it," murmured the doctor.

"And I am also sure that they plotted something against me this evening. Madame Bréhal must have told you that I was summoned away by my notary on important business. Well, I went in all haste to the Rue de Babylone, and I there learned that my notary had not written to me. The letter was a forged one. I don't doubt but what it was the work of one of those two knaves. But what their purpose was I cannot imagine."

"I know what it was."

"You do? Then tell me at once."

"Not here, my friend. I have serious things to talk to you about, and some sad news to communicate to you. So, if there is nothing to keep you here, follow me."

They then left the room, and no one paid any more attention to their departure than they had to Corléon's disappearance, for the game had begun again. The doctor led his friend into the little room where, two days previously, they had heard the architect Capdenac describe the marvels of Madame Bréhal's pavilion. The place was well chosen for conversation, for at this hour they could rely upon not being disturbed.

"Well," asked Courtenay, "what is your news?"

"An accident has happened to Madame Bréhal," said Coulanges, abruptly.

"My God! but nothing serious, I hope?"

"Her life is not in danger, but——"

"Go on! You are making me suffer agony with your hesitation."

"The truth is, my friend, that the horse of her brougham ran away; the carriage was overturned, and Madame Bréhal has broken both her legs."

"Broken both her legs! Oh! how frightful, and I——"

"The fractures are simple ones, very fortunately, and there are no complications to be feared. A cure is certain, and there will not remain any trace of the accident; still her recovery will take a long time. She had just left the opera when the misfortune occurred."

"Were you there?"

"No, but I learned of it very speedily, for I was not far away."

"And you did not come and tell me of it till now!"

"My dear fellow, I first had to take care of Madame Bréhal and accompany her home. The removal on a stretcher lasted at least an hour."

"Upon a stretcher!" repeated George.

"Yes, that is the best thing in such a case; in fact, the only one. I also had to send for the best surgeon in Paris, for I did not wish to trust to my own skill alone, and this surgeon set the broken limbs much better than I could have done it. I also wanted to know his opinion before seeing you. In short, I have only just come from

the Avenue de Villiers, and I assure you that I did not lose a minute. Besides, I do not regret having waited, for now I can completely reassure you. Madame Bréhal is going on as well as possible, and the surgeon does not fear any dangerous consequences."

"He may be mistaken. Let us go! I wish to see her."

"I understand your impatience, my dear George, but you must wait until to-morrow. Madame Bréhal needs repose, and your visit would excite her. She asked me to tell you that she would receive you to-morrow morning, and that she would be very happy to see you. She only thinks of you in the midst of her sufferings."

"She suffers, then?"

"Yes, but she possesses extraordinary courage. She does not allow a complaint to escape her, and, when I reached the spot, a few minutes after the accident, I found her calmer than you are at this moment."

"But how was it that the horse ran away? The coachman is a good one, and he has been in the habit of driving Max."

"It was not his fault. He could neither foresee nor prevent an attempted crime."

"What do you mean?"

"Ah! my dear fellow, prepare yourself to hear some very surprising things. Do you remember that, before you left the opera, I went to see if Madame Bréhal's brougham had arrived?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, whom do you suppose I surprised in the Rue Gluck talking to a young man in a blouse and a cap? Monsieur de Pontaumur in person. He did not see me; he left the fellow in the blouse after giving him his instructions, and jumped into a passing cab. I hoped to catch the young chap, who was coming towards me, but the moment he caught sight of me, he turned and ran away."

"He knew you, then?"

"It is more than probable, but I did not succeed in seeing his face."

"And do you think that Pontaumur ordered this man to excite the horse, so that it would run away?"

"I am sure of it, and this is why: Three-quarters of an hour afterwards, when Madame Bréhal and myself reached the spot where her carriage was waiting, I discovered the same fellow hiding in a doorway."

"But you were there to defend Madame Bréhal!"

"I had no chance to defend her, for he only attacked the horse. When she had entered the brougham, and while I was closing the door, he suddenly darted forward and touched the dark bay, who immediately started off at a gallop. I ran after the rascal, and I should have caught him perhaps, if he had not jumped into another brougham, which was waiting for him in the Rue Mogador, a brougham which I had already seen in the Champs-Élysées, and which I very strongly suspect belongs to Monsieur de Pontaumur."

"There is no doubt of it, and the complicity of the two scoundrels is evident. But who could that agent be? Corléon?"

"No. It was not his build or height. I am rather inclined to think that it was simply some street loafer whom Pontaurmur paid to do his villanous work. If so, we shall not find him again. The coachman declares, however, that he would recognise him, for he lashed him across the face with his whip."

"Well, I shall not bother myself about the accomplice. Pontaurmur is the man I want."

"And what are you going to say to him?"

"I don't know as yet. The story you have told me is so extraordinary, that I wonder if you are not mistaken."

"Both Madame Bréhal and the coachman saw the man jump at the horse's head."

"Yes, but the horse is very shy, he might have run away of his own accord, if you had merely shut the door too hard."

"On the contrary, I closed it very gently. I had been warned that he was apt to bolt."

"But what did the knave do? Did he strike Max, or prick him, or what?"

"This is what the coachman picked up on the spot where the horse fell," said the doctor, presenting a round object, which he held between his thumb and forefinger.

"A bullet!" exclaimed Courtenay. "What does that mean?"

"It means that the man in the blouse placed that bullet in the horse's ear." And as George did not seem to understand, Coulanges continued: "You know that a horse always runs away if any one drops into his ear something hard, which he cannot get rid of—a little pebble, for example; or better still, a leaden bullet. One can also use a bit of burning timber for the same purpose, it is a surer means still; but the fellow did not think of that, and besides, the bullet sufficed, for it drove Max absolutely crazy."

"But this was a regular attempt at murder!" cried George.

"Most certainly it was, for the villains expected that Madame Bréhal would be killed, and it is really a miracle that she escaped as she did. They wished for her death, and they sent you a forged letter to draw you away, because they feared that Madame Bréhal would take you in her carriage."

"Then, if I am to believe you, they wish to preserve my life! That is absurd. Madame Bréhal's enemies are also mine!"

"That may be, and yet I am certain of what I say. They didn't want to kill you, They preferred that you should live."

"Why? For what purpose?"

"Ah! Now you have me! I am as ignorant of that point as you are, and this mystery is connected with another, which has occupied my thoughts for nearly a month past."

"Do you mean since Maurice Saulieu's death?"

"Precisely."

"But what connection can you see between the duel in which our friend was killed and this accident, which might have cost Madame Bréhal her life?"

The doctor hesitated for an instant, but he felt it was impossible for him to continue silent as to the secrets which weighed upon him, and so he decided to speak. "My dear George," he said, "the time has come to make my confession to you. You must know, then, that the duel in which Saulieu perished was an unfair one. Know, also, that, immediately after this duel, I acquired almost positive conviction that Saulieu could not have wounded his adversary, because the pistol he used was not properly loaded."

"What! Why, it was loaded before your eyes."

"Yes, by that gentleman who cheats at baccarat, and who cheated that day at a much more serious game, for he loaded Saulieu's pistol with a wooden ball, which would prove quite inoffensive at thirty paces."

"And you let him do it?"

"I did not perceive anything. The scoundrel is very adroit with his hands; you know that by the way he handled his counters at play. He juggled in the same way with the leaden bullet I gave him, and substituted another for it; another one which I picked up on the duelling-ground while you had gone to fetch the men at the inn, and which I will show you some time or other, for I have carefully preserved it."

"Then they virtually murdered Maurice!"

"Exactly. And I haven't the slightest doubt but what it was pre-meditated, for I afterwards discovered that the pistols were marked. If the two adversaries had drawn them by lot, as Corléon proposed, Pontaumur could have recognised the one he ought to choose by the touch. I will show you a small screw in the butt of one of the weapons."

"You knew this, and yet you did not denounce these scoundrels!"

"I was wrong, but I can plead extenuating circumstances. In the first place, the proofs I possessed were not such as are easily accepted in a court of law. I should have had great difficulty in convincing a magistrate by the exhibition of a little wooden ball, which no one saw me pick up in the redoubt at Gennevilliers. Who knows if I should not have been suspected of having manufactured it? Believe me, my friend, I should have attained no good result, and we—you and I—would have found ourselves implicated in a nasty business. Public opinion often confounds the innocent and the guilty. I acknowledge that this last consideration decided me to keep silent."

"You at least ought to have informed me and asked my advice," said Courtenay, angrily.

"If you will take the trouble to reflect," replied the doctor, perfectly unmoved, "you will see that I did right in not saying anything to you. You were not cool enough. The friendship



which you felt for Saulieu would have carried you to extremities, and perhaps we should never have unravelled the mystery which enveloped that abominable crime. I wished to go to the bottom of things, to discover the murderer's motive. For the last three weeks I have been secretly searching for it, and I have found it at last this evening."

"The motive! Why, it was Pontaumur's cowardice. He had been struck, so that he was obliged to fight, but he wished to fight without incurring any risk."

"Perhaps so. But that was not the only motive. Certain things have happened which cast a strange light upon Monsieur de Pontaumur's conduct."

"Yes, he has endeavoured to ruin Madame Bréhal's reputation, and has even tried to kill her, if it was indeed he whom you saw in the neighbourhood of the opera house. Still, this last crime does not explain the first."

"I will try to prove to you that the same motive impelled Pontaumur to get rid first of Saulieu and then of Madame Bréhal. I will leave Corléon on one side; he must be under the orders and in the pay of Pontaumur, and only played a subordinate part in the two affairs."

"That is probable. But what was Pontaumur's motive?"

"His interests are connected with those of another person, a woman with whom he must be intimately connected."

"I begin to see what you mean, but——"

"Come; you have not forgotten the conversation which we had together at your house this very morning in reference to the old chiffonier which I purchased for Delphine, and which certainly contained Maurice Saulieu's will. Well, after leaving you, I met Delphine, and after various incidents which it is useless for me to relate to you, I acquired the certainty that the will was stolen from her house by Monsieur de Pontaumur, who had passed himself off as a rich Spaniard who admired her; he even gave twenty-five louis to the little fool who left him alone in the room where the chiffonier was. Do you think that he would have given so much money, and have acted so imprudently, if your friend's heiress were indifferent to him?"

"No. Possibly he has relations with her, the nature of which I do not understand. I will even admit, if you like, that she is or has been his mistress. It would be monstrous, but it is possible. It would explain the point—that Monsieur de Pontaumur wished to enrich Mademoiselle Mezenc. Still, it would not explain Maurice's murder or the attempt against Madame Bréhal."

"There is a supposition which explains everything, if it be well founded—a supposition which I have already submitted to you, and which did not strike you as very probable. Suppose that Mademoiselle Mezenc loves you, or, what comes to the same thing, as far as my argument goes, that she wishes to marry you?"

"That idea has occurred to me more than once, but I have never seriously entertained it."

"Entertain it for a moment, and you will see that everything is clear. Mademoiselle Mezenc cast her eyes upon you ; but you did not notice her, and poor Saulieu asked her hand in marriage. She accepted him, and he made his will. She knew that he had left her all his fortune. That was the moment which Monsieur de Pontaumur chose to circulate sundry damaging reports about her, reports which came to Saulieu's ears. Saulieu struck him. They fought and Saulieu was killed, you know how. Then Mademoiselle Mezenc became an heiress and free to marry whomsoever she chose, and it is you whom she selected."

"If this were only true !"

"Wait a bit ; let us see what follows. She learnt from you that the will had disappeared ; but Maurice had told her where it was. She set Monsieur de Pontaumur on the track, for she had not given up the idea of inheriting the property. It would help to console her, if her great project failed ; and if the latter succeeded, she would, in your eyes, acquire a reputation for disinterestedness, for she would then refuse this fortune, which she would not need if she became your wife."

"Yes, your reasoning is good," murmured George, almost convinced by the doctor's arguments.

"The one thing to be done was to conquer you," continued Coulanges, imperturbably. "The enterprise was all the more difficult, as she could scarcely go into society as in the past, and you were not intimate with her mother. However, Madame Bréhal, with the innocent imprudence of an honest woman, offered her the opportunity she needed. Mademoiselle Mezenc gladly accepted the proposal to go and paint some pictures in that pavilion, where she hoped that you would often come. It was then that Monsieur de Pontaumur emphasised the performances which he had commenced some time before. It was necessary to ruin the reputation of Madame Bréhal, who might prove a rival. Thus Pontaumur procured a key to the enclosure. He entered it at night, arranging so as to be seen, and he mounted the hillock which overlooks Madame Bréhal's domain, remaining there in contemplation for hours at a time."

"I now remember, too, that the porter who guards the entrance in the Rue de Courcelles was recommended by Madame Mezenc."

"He is therefore devoted to Mademoiselle Mezenc. But let us proceed to the end. On the day before yesterday, after the lunch at which I was present, Madame Bréhal informed Mademoiselle Mezenc that your marriage was decided upon. All was lost for the ambitious girl who had made up her mind to marry you. Desperate measures were necessary to prevent the collapse of her plans, and Monsieur de Pontaumur immediately conceived an infernal project, and hired a rascal to execute it. He learnt that Madame Bréhal was going to the opera ; he sent his brougham to wait near by, for

the sole purpose of helping his infamous agent to escape, and he himself entered the stalls. He saw you in the box, and as he did not wish you also to be killed by the accident he was preparing, he went out to prepare the letter which was intended to draw you away. He did not care whether I entered the carriage with Madame Bréhal or not, for it mattered little if I were killed with her, but the life of Mademoiselle Mezenc's future husband was precious. The wooden bullet of the duel perhaps suggested the idea of dropping that leaden bullet in the horse's ear. You know the rest. And now, my dear friend, that you have heard my deductions, draw your own conclusions."

"I conclude," cried George excitedly, "that Pontaumur and his accomplices are scoundrels who must be exterminated. But I still dislike to think that Mademoiselle Mezenc was in the plot. If this man be her lover, he may have acted without consulting her."

"As regards the discovery of her will, and the attempt against Madame Bréhal, it is impossible. She alone knew that the will was hidden in one of the legs of the chiffonier bookcase, and that Madame Bréhal was going to marry you."

"She might have given him the information, but I am sure that she took no active part in the affair of the runaway horse, and I will never believe that she was concerned in the murder of her lover, Saulieu."

"It would be horrible, if it were true, but, if you were on a jury, what should you decide?"

"I don't know as yet, but I swear to you that I will avenge Maurice, and I will not stop at conjectures. To condemn her I must be certain of my facts. To-morrow I also will start an investigation; but this evening, not a word more my friend, or you will drive me mad! Let us go!"

## XI.

IN a chamber hung with silk of a dark tint, upon a four-post bedstead, raised upon a daïs, lay Madame Bréhal, enveloped in a white satin wrapper. Her head rested upon a pile of pillows, and looked as if floating in a sea of lace. Her delicate hands played with a feather fan, her lips were parted in a smile, and at first sight one would have been tempted to believe that she had only lain down to rest after returning from a ball. But it was very quickly perceived that, if the upper part of her body enjoyed freedom of motion, her lower limbs were absolutely powerless. The wrapper, sustained by an ingenious apparatus, formed a sort of arch above her legs (which could not bear coming into contact with even the finest and softest stuff) and fell in folds about her feet.

On one side of the bed George sat upon an ottoman, and on the other, near the invalid's head, Dr. Coulanges was standing.

Madame Bréhal received her lover and her physician as the great ladies of the Hôtel Rambouillet received their adorers in olden times.

The lover was melancholy, but the doctor did not at all wear a professional air, and the lady was very gay.

There was none of the usual paraphernalia of a sick room in sight, such as bottles, spoons, and bandages, but there were flowers everywhere ; and through the open windows came the song of the birds warbling in the garden.

"I should never have believed that I should so soon grow accustomed to lying still," said Madame Bréhal, laughingly. "I have never been seriously laid up before, but it seems to me as if I had been like this all my life."

"I admire your courage," murmured Courtenay.

"Oh ! I don't deserve much credit for being resigned. Our good doctor promises to cure me, and you are near me. What more could I want ? Do you think that I regret not being able to pay any visits or to drive in the Bois ? Those pastimes are not worth a pleasant talk with those one loves, and I don't presume that you will abandon me."

"I abandoned you too much yesterday. Ah ! if you knew what anguish I suffered last night," said George. "I longed to see you, but Coulanges told me that you would not receive me until noon to-day."

"Excuse a woman's coquetry. I wished to prepare my surroundings, and modern surgery has invented some charming

appliances. If you did not know that that wretched Max had nearly killed me you would not suspect that both my legs have been plastered with dextrine and enclosed in wooden splints. So I can venture to hope that you don't find me too ugly. Yesterday, after the accident, I can assure you that I looked horrible."

"I protest," exclaimed Coulanges. "Seated upon a cushion, before your broken carriage, in the midst of those frightened people, you had the bearing and beauty of a queen."

"A queen whose chariot had been overturned, and who was not escorted by any gentlemen of her court. Instead of guards, there were only policemen about me, and I was carried home on a hospital stretcher."

"You were as calm as you are now ; you were superb."

"I confess that I felt frightened when Max took the bit between his teeth. I knew what he was capable of, and I feared that I was lost beyond redemption. This only lasted three minutes, and yet I had time to think of a thousand things—the past, the present, and the future ; one sees triple at such moments. I again saw the pathway where George told me he loved me ; I wondered what he would do when I was dead, and what reconciled me to dying was the thought that he was safe. I blessed the notary who had summoned him, for if George had remained at the opera he would have entered my brougham with me, and perished with me ; I remembered that he had told me that he had come on foot, and I had meant to drive him home. I thought I might have allowed myself that pleasure, matters having gone so far——"

"They will go further still," interrupted Courtenay.

"Ah ! my friend," said Madame Bréhal, with a shade of sadness, "my sentiments have not changed, and I do not doubt the constancy of yours, but we cannot be married, now, in a few days."

"There is only a delay."

"A delay to which uncertainty must be added."

"What do you mean ?"

"That my happiness depends on the success of my cure. It is frightfully prosaic, but it is the truth."

"I really do not understand you, Gabrielle."

"Then I will explain myself more clearly. I have entire confidence in the predictions of our friend here. I hope that his care and skill will again make me what I was when you loved me ; but, if he be mistaken, if science be powerless to restore what I have lost—that is, the use of my limbs—I shall certainly give you back your word."

"Do you think that I would take it back ?"

"No, my dear George, but I would refuse the sacrifice. You could not marry a cripple."

"Oh ! madame," exclaimed Coulanges, "you have very little faith. If my predictions merely were in question, I should say nothing. But you doubt the illustrious surgeon, who answers for your complete cure. That is wicked."

"My dear doctor, I am very believing, but we must also rely upon the unexpected; and if George wishes to please me he will not at present speak any more of a project which is as dear to me as to himself, and which I have a firm hope will be realised. Let us keep this hope in our hearts, and yet prepare ourselves to bear our unhappiness, if it be Heaven's will that it should come."

"You must allow me to see you every day," said George; "on that condition I promise that I won't say a word more about our marriage. Since I am absolutely certain that we *shall* be married, silence will cost me little."

"Agreed!" exclaimed Madame Bréhal, holding out her hand. "Not only will I allow you to come as often as you like, but I shall be profoundly grateful to you for remaining faithful to me and brightening up my solitude; yes, my solitude, for I have given orders to admit no one. I wish people to believe me very ill, and those who are indifferent to me will forget me. You will see that people will cease thinking of us, and I want to conceal my happiness from prying eyes. Now, to pass to a pleasanter subject, I must tell you, my dear doctor, what I was thinking of, when they were setting my poor legs. You will smile, but I am only a woman. I was thinking of a ball at which I waltzed with George, and I said to myself that that waltz would be perhaps my last, and I wept a little; you did not see it, but I did."

George took the hand which his betrothed offered him and kissed it. He was so touched that tears came into his own eyes.

"I won't cry any more, I promise you," she continued, "but still I have a great sorrow, and that, my friend, you can remove. Mademoiselle Mezenc, as I told you last evening at the opera, seems to be angry with me. I don't know whether I have unintentionally hurt her feelings, but I am sure that she would come to see me if she knew what had happened. Oh! I guess what you want to answer, but I beg of you to be silent. I may be mistaken as to Marianne's real sentiments and judge her too favourably, but leave me my illusions, and consent to go and see her for me, and tell her of the accident which condemns me to remain at home."

"It seems to me that it would be sufficient to write," answered Courtenay, coldly.

"No. I wish you to see her. Tell her that I wish her to come, and if she refuses, ask her what grievance she has against me. I hope that she has none, but if she has one, I wish to know what it is; and I do not want any other ambassador than you. It is an invalid's caprice, and you must excuse it."

George and the doctor exchanged a look. The same idea had come to both of them, that now was the time to tell Madame Bréhal the facts with which they were acquainted, but of which she had not the slightest suspicion. Coulanges had taken good care not to explain the real cause of the accident to her. It is not a physician's duty to afflict his patient by telling her that an attempt has been

made to kill her. To George alone belonged the task of explaining the reasons of his repugnance to see Mademoiselle Mezenc on behalf of the charming woman he was to marry ; he alone could venture to declare why he detested the girl wooed by poor Maurice Saulieu, who had been murdered in so cruel a manner by M. de Pontaumur and his acolyte Corléon.

However, George had had time to reflect, since he had heard the doctor's confession, and while resolving to open an investigation in person, he had also resolved to remain silent until he had acquired the certainty that Mademoiselle Mezenc was guilty of complicity in the infamous plots which had cost Maurice Saulieu his life, and laid Madame Bréhal upon a sick bed.

What was the use of speaking of the wooden and the leaden bullets, if he did not speak of the false letter from the notary ? He had this letter with him, and he might have shown it to Madame Bréhal, who would perhaps recognise the handwriting. But once started he would assuredly have gone further than he wished to go. Madame Bréhal would have asked him questions which he would have been obliged to answer, and the time had not yet come to accuse the girl of being the accomplice, voluntary or involuntary, of those two scoundrels.

"I will do as you request me," he said, forcing a smile ; "I even regret that you do not put my obedience to a more difficult proof."

"Take care ! I might take you at your word," replied Madame Bréhal, gaily, "but I will not abuse my authority. Only, as you are willing to deliver my message, pray do so at once. If you defer going you will risk missing Marianne, whereas at this hour you will be sure to find her at home."

"Very well ; but, since you send me away, I shall take Coulanges with me."

"Monsieur Coulanges will return, and you as well. As regards yourself, I expect that before this evening you will bring me Marianne's answer, and my physician in ordinary owes me two visits a day. I, therefore, easily resign myself to letting you both go."

"If I had foreseen that you were going to dismiss us so quickly, I don't think that I should have promised anything," said Courtenay, laughing : "but I have given my promise, and I will keep it."

"I also will keep my promises, if Heaven permits," answered Madame Bréhal.

She punctuated this declaration with a smile which amply rewarded George for his obedience. The doctor received a warm pressure of the hand, and he was not sorry to leave, for he had not yet told Courtenay all that he wished to say. They had parted the evening before rather abruptly, and they had not come to the Avenue de Villiers together.

George once more kissed Madame Bréhal's hand ; she rang for her maid, and the two friends then departed.

The charming widow's people were very fond of her, and those servants whom the friends met in the hall questioned the doctor as to her condition. He speedily reassured them, and passed with Courtenay into the court-yard. Here they met the coachman, who had entirely recovered from the effects of his fall. Coming up to Dr. Coulanges, he exclaimed: "Ah! if you had not forbidden me to go to the police, sir, how I would have punished that little rascal who killed Max and broke madame's legs! I am sure that he must be roaming about the opera every evening, to open the carriage doors; and I should certainly recognise him, for my whip cut his face. I shall certainly have time to search for him now, as madame can't go out, and I shall do so to-night."

"Very well, my friend," responded the doctor, "but, if you meet him, I advise you not to appeal to the police. They wouldn't arrest him, as they would not understand the story of the bullet dropped into Max's ear."

"I don't know about that, some of them have served in the cavalry. However, you may be easy, I shall not appeal to them. I shall content myself with grabbing him by the collar and giving him a good hiding."

"That would be worse still. You would be taken to the police-station, and Madame Bréhal would not keep you in her service. Do you know what I should do if I were in your place? I should simply follow the individual, and find out where he lives. Then come and tell me, and I will take charge of the rest."

"As you wish, sir," muttered the coachman, who was not over-pleased, however, by this suggestion.

The two friends now passed out into the Avenue de Villiers. They had each come in a cab, but neither of them had kept his vehicle waiting. However, they were in no hurry, and as they wanted to talk, they descended the avenue on foot.

"If that coachman set his hand on Pontaumur's agent, we should make a great step on the road to discovery," said Courtenay.

"It seems to me, on the contrary, that we should not be much more advanced," replied Coulanges. "Pontaumur directed everything, we can have no doubt of that. What do we care for his agent? The great point is to know exactly what part was played by Mademoiselle Mezenc in the two affairs."

"You are right. But do you understand why Madame Bréhal sends me to make propositions of peace?"

"Madame Bréhal is too good, she will not believe in evil. You can at any time tell her the truth in regard to her friend. However, the errand she has sent you on furnishes you with an excellent excuse to penetrate into the enemy's camp."

"The fact is, if I were not obliged I should never set foot in that apartment of the Rue Blanche, where Maurice's murder was plotted, perhaps. Mademoiselle Mezenc inspires me with instinctive



repulsion, although I have great difficulty in believing that a girl so cold and proud prepared such abominable crimes."

"I also have great difficulty in believing it. But you know the proverb: 'Still waters run deep.' We must try to see what this water hides under its calm surface. In the course of an hour's conversation you can find out how this young person feels disposed towards Madame Bréhal. And then we will try to discover the life led by this angel of purity, who pretends to remain a virgin and a martyr since she has lost her betrothed. Those are almost precisely the words she used when I was alone with her the other day in the marble pavilion. Between ourselves, I should not be surprised if she had had very intimate relations with Pontaurmur for a long time."

"And when I think that Maurice nearly married her!"

"Well, I almost regret that that marriage did not take place."

"Why so?"

"Because then Maurice would still be alive, no doubt, while this young woman, supposing her guilty, would have already been exposed and disgraced. Maurice would have, no doubt, detected her intrigue with Pontaurmur, and have sued for a divorce—that is, if he did not take the law into his own hands. Husbands, you know, are always acquitted in such cases as these. Ah!" added Coulanges, "this Mademoiselle Mezenc ought to be married—her husband would, no doubt, avenge us all!"

Courtenay remained silent. The discourses of his friend doubtless interested him but little, for he seemed absorbed in reflections which were not pleasant ones, at least judging from his countenance.

Coulanges respected his reverie, and after a long silence they reached the end of the Avenue de Villiers, and found themselves on the exterior boulevards. Here they were to separate; for to reach the Rue Blanche, where Madame and Mademoiselle Mezenc lived, the Boulevard des Batignolles is the shortest route, and the doctor's way lay in the opposite direction. He was about to take leave of his friend, when Courtenay abruptly asked: "Have you anything particular to do just now?"

"No. I promised Madame Bréhal another visit during the day, but I did not say at what time. I expect Delphine, who promised to come and receive her reward for the information she furnished me yesterday in regard to that mock Spanish don, Pontaurmur. But she is not wonderfully punctual, as a rule, and if she arrives before I do, she will wait, no doubt. But why do you ask me that?"

"Because I should like you to accompany me."

"To Mademoiselle Mezenc's? You can't think of it, my dear fellow! I scarcely know her, and I am not Madame Bréhal's ambassador. I should inconvenience you in the accomplishment of your mission, and I should be ill at ease myself, for I should not know what to do."

"I don't ask you to go in with me, but only to wait for me at the door."

"Supposing she should be at the window?"

"Well, wait for me on the Place Blanche, which is near her house."

"Very willingly; but for what purpose?"

"I very much want to tell you the result of my interview with her. After that interview I shall probably have a decision to take, and I shall need your advice."

"I think that you might very well dispense with it, still I will not refuse it. Let us proceed together on this embassy, since you appoint me your first attaché."

They walked on side by side along the Boulevard des Batignolles, keeping close to the walls in order to avoid the glare of the sun. Courtenay had become silent again, and Coulanges amused himself by watching the promenaders under the shade of the trees planted across the street. They were chiefly working-girls and nurses, but suddenly he saw a sun-shade of the most brilliant scarlet hue, which seemed to be coming towards him. This sun-shade, moreover, abruptly crossed the street, and was suddenly raised, discovering the laughing face of Delphine du Rainey. "Ah!" she cried. "What luck to meet you! I have some news to tell you; I have found Fernando."

Courtenay looked up in considerable annoyance on hearing these words addressed to his friend. He did not know Delphine, but he guessed at once that the damsel with the flaming sun-shade must be one of the doctor's theatrical patients, and he hoped that Coulanges would speedily get rid of her. She came tripping along, balancing herself on her high-heeled shoes, and she said to the doctor, who appeared delighted at the meeting, "Yes, I have run the dark gentleman to earth, and I know all about him now. I feel inclined to sing the comic song, 'There are people who Spanish claim to be!'"

"Who are no more Spanish than you and me," chimed in the doctor, who was well acquainted with the popular concert refrains. "Well, I am not astonished; I warned you, remember. But tell me your story."

"This gentleman is with you, I suppose?" asked Delphine, looking at Courtenay, who had approached.

"Yes, he is my best friend. You can speak before him. George, let me present you to Madame du Rainey, one of the stars of the Parisian stage."

George bowed coldly, and glanced at Coulanges with a frown.

"It was for her," continued the doctor, "that I purchased that little piece of furniture I spoke to you about."

George, on hearing this, changed in demeanour, and smiled pleasantly; and it was as well that he did so, for Delphine, who had taken offence at his severe air, was about to decamp without even commencing her interesting narrative. "I am afraid that my story will not interest this gentleman much," she said, simpering.

"Oh, yes, indeed it will!" exclaimed George. "Besides, a story related by a pretty woman is always interesting."

"Ah ! you are pleasant now. But a moment ago you glared at me so that you quite frightened me. I am very easily frightened."

"Yes, I know that you are a regular sensitive plant," laughed the doctor ; "but you are not frightened now. My friend is no more a bugbear than I am. So you can proceed with your narrative. Besides, he knows a little about it already ; I have explained to him how you made the acquaintance of a gentleman who was after your chiffonier. You have seen him again, it seems ?"

"Yes ; and I was on my way home when I just caught sight of you. If it will not tire your friend to climb four flights of stairs, pray come with me to the Rue de Constantinople."

"Another time, my dear ! Another time I will bring my friend, who will be delighted to hear you sing. But to-day we are in a great hurry. My friend has an appointment with his notary."

"What luck ! I haven't any notary, because I haven't any houses or stocks and shares. And when I think that I might have had a fine package of bank-notes, if that villain Fernando had not rummaged in the legs of the chiffonier you gave me ! For you cannot make me believe that the hiding-place did not contain some valuables. I have kept the pink string with which they were tied up."

George listened impatiently to this chatter, and Delphine, perceiving it, resumed : "You want to talk here, eh ? Well, I don't mind. We are in the shade, and we sha'n't be disturbed. Only, I don't care to remain still ; let us walk up and down—you on my left, and your friend on my right. The sidewalk is broad enough for three."

They had to agree to this arrangement, under penalty of losing the story, which promised to be interesting.

"Did you tell him what you thought of his conduct ?" asked Coulanges.

"I wanted to, but I remembered the instructions you gave me. You advised me to follow him and find out where he lived. Well, doctor, I know now, and I hardly expected that we were neighbours."

"What ! He lives in your neighbourhood ?" exclaimed Coulanges, in surprise, for he knew very well that Pontaumur lived in the Avenue d'Eylau, a long way off from the Rue de Constantinople. Thus it would seem as if Delphine's hidalgo were not Saulieu's adversary.

"Not exactly in my neighbourhood," rejoined Delphine. "He is a Castilian of Batignolles ; and I have learned some queer things about him. A lady frequently goes to his house, closely veiled."

Coulanges and Courtenay exchanged glances.

"But I am beginning at the end," resumed the damsel ; "and I must tell you, in the first place, how I caught him. I went out, after breakfast, to have my fortune told. I know a clairvoyant who lives near Montmartre, and I wished to ascertain if Fernando

would return. I could not find a seat in the tram-car, so I walked along the boulevard where we now are, till, just as I came to the Place Clichy, where there is a statue——”

“The statue of Marshal Moncey?”

“I don’t know. However, what do I see? Why, a pretty brougham stopping at the corner of the Rue d’Amsterdam, and my Fernando getting out.”

“A dark-green brougham, drawn by a sorrel horse?”

“Sorrel is a sort of yellow, isn’t it? Well, it was a sorrel. Do you know him?”

“Perhaps I do, but go on.”

“Well, I pretended to be looking in a shop window. Fernando did not see me, but I have eyes in the back of my head, you know, and, without turning, I saw him enter the Avenue de Clichy on foot.”

“The avenue which was formerly called the Grand Rue des Batignolles?”

“Probably. Well, I said to myself: ‘My good fellow, I am going to find out what you have come here for,’ and I started off to follow him, keeping some distance behind him, of course. The Avenue de Clichy is always full of people. But it leads to the fortifications, and I was wondering if Fernando were going there, when suddenly he turned up a side street I didn’t know. I did not wish to lose him and I hurried on. When I reached the corner, round which he had turned, I saw him still walking on. There was no one else in the street at the moment, and I could not risk following him. However, I remained at the corner, and four or five minutes afterwards I saw Fernando stop at the further end and enter a house. I had him, you see!”

“But you did not stop there, I hope?”

“No. I commenced by looking up, and I saw that the name of the street was the Rue Ganneron; and then I dashed into it, keeping close to the houses. Here and there there was a shop and some children playing about the doors. It was as quiet and still as a village street, and at the end I found the wall of the Montmartre cemetery. Ah! Fernando has chosen a queer place to live in, and the view from his windows must be lively, cypresses and tombstones, indeed!”

“I certainly scarcely expected to learn that this lord of yours had elected to live near a cemetery. But are you sure that he lives there?”

“On the contrary, I am sure that he doesn’t. However, he comes there every day, and sometimes twice a day.”

“Why? Does he make counterfeit coin?” asked the doctor, laughing.

“No, but he receives a lady there. Perhaps she’s a married woman and has to be discreet, so Fernando, no doubt, took this little house so as to be able to see her on the sly. I don’t think

much of the house outside, three windows with heavy shutters, and a little dingy door. However, it is very stylish inside."

"How do you know?"

"Why, my dear doctor, I have got a tongue in my head. I discovered a greengrocer's shop, and I entered it to buy some asparagus. The woman there was a regular gossip, I can tell you, and she told me all that I wished to know. Fernando hasn't any servants in his house, and no one enters it excepting himself and the lady. They have each a key, and they always arrive separately and on foot. He leaves his carriage on that open space where the statue is. The lady perhaps has hers, which waits somewhere else. The next house has been to let for some time, and no one will take it. The woman at the greengrocer's shop is charged with renting it."

George had not lost a word of this somewhat rambling narrative, and the doctor now exclaimed: "Delphine, you are decidedly the most intelligent woman I know; and it is a pleasure to listen to you."

"Wait a bit! I have kept the best till the last. I have seen the lady who visits Fernando."

"Ah! Bah!"

"While I was talking to the woman in the shop, she passed by."

"What did she look like?"

"I could not see her face, for she wore a thick veil. But she is rather tall, a pretty figure, and was very simply dressed, all in black, so as not to be remarked. Ah! she knows what she's about."

"And did you not wait for her return?"

"Not I! I had had enough of it. I paid for my asparagus, talked a little longer with the woman, and learned some other things, which did not interest me much, however; for instance, the name of the owner of the house.—a Madame Fresnay."

"Madame Fresnay!" repeated George.

"That was certainly the name the woman gave me," replied Delphine, a little startled by the vehemence of the doctor's friend.

"Come, my dear," remarked the doctor, "you had better think no more about your Fernando. As for that woman and the house, what does it all matter to you? Keep the twenty-five louis Fernando gave you, and cut him dead if you meet him."

"That is what I shall do. But how was it that you advised me differently yesterday? Even if I have the twenty-five louis, I have lost what was in the chiffonier. The fortune-teller told me that I had been on the point of finding a treasure."

"You consulted her all the same, then?"

"I have just come from there. I didn't care to mount guard outside Fernando's house."

"Then you saw the lady enter that house some time ago?"

"Oh! quite two hours ago. I was going to your house to tell you all about it. Well, I won't ask you to come and see me now, since you are in a hurry, but you must come to-morrow with your friend."

"Yes, and you will lose nothing by waiting. I will bring you a present which will be worth more than the papers hidden in the legs of the chiffonier; for there was nothing there, I'd bet. Treasures, you see, only exist in sensational novels. Your fortune-teller robbed you of your money."

"Oh! I don't regret it, for she told me that I should make the acquaintance of a wealthy gentleman, dark and handsome," replied Delphine with a glance at George. "But I don't wish to detain your friend," she added to the doctor, "since he is going to his notary's, and besides, I have only just time to dress to go to my rehearsal. Don't forget that I depend upon your visit."

George responded with a smile, which Delphine was free to take as a promise, and Coulanges did not try to prolong the interview. The damsel pirouetted on her high heels and then departed.

"Well, Courtenay, what do you think of it?" asked the doctor when they were alone. "It seems to me that we are amply informed. By Jove! I never thought that this information would come from that little goose."

"What difference does it make where it comes from?" exclaimed Courtenay. "The information is correct, you don't doubt it, nor I either, and Mademoiselle Mezenc is certainly Pontaurmur's mistress."

"Then, you think that it was she who entered that house?"

"Think it? Why, who could help thinking it? Do you doubt it?"

"I—I hesitate."

"What more information do you need to be convinced? Didn't you hear that the house belongs to Madame Fresnay?"

"Madame Fresnay can't possibly be aware of her niece's conduct."

"You don't know Madame Fresnay, and you have no idea as to what she is capable of. The words which led Saulieu to fight were spoken at that woman's house, and she repeated them. Soon after the duel, while you were still at Saint-Ouen, she knew the result."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Perfectly sure. She met Madame Bréhal at her dressmaker's, and she told her that Maurice had been killed. There was but one person from which she could have obtained this information. Pontaurmur, on his arrival in Paris, no doubt went to her house, or at least sent her a telegram. Therefore, she was in the plot."

"Well, but Mademoiselle Mezenc?"

"She also knew of the event before seeing me. She was watching for me at the window, I saw her from my carriage, and when I alighted, she retired to assume a carefully-studied pose in one of the arm-chairs which adorn her studio. She expected me. And after playing the comedy of sorrow like a consummate actress, she had the audacity to let me guess that she was in love with me. It is all clear now. Pontaurmur has been this woman's lover for a long time, and they understand one another completely. He tried, in the first place, to please Madame Bréhal, and if he had succeeded in marrying her, he would have shared his wife's money with Made-

moiselle Mezenc. When he realised, however, that Madame Bréhal would not have him, he formed another scheme. Saulieu presented himself, and Mademoiselle Mezenc accepted him, temporarily; for she had really resolved to marry me. I remember that she did all she could to attract my attention, and she succeeded. I thought her charming, and I made the mistake of letting her see it. It was then that Saulieu's death was resolved upon. They killed him; and if I had fallen into the trap which Mademoiselle Mezenc set for me, her plans would have succeeded. Come, acknowledge that my reasoning, founded upon facts, is irrefutable."

"Oh! I do not say otherwise," replied Coulanges. "I am of opinion that Pontaurmur's intrigue with Mademoiselle Mezenc is of long standing, and that Madame Fresnay is aware of it."

"I shall know all that for a certainty, when I have seen Mademoiselle Mezenc."

"You persist, then, in going to her house?"

"Yes, and I shall have sufficient self-control to look her in the face and to speak of the noble woman whom her lover attempted to destroy; her answers will help me to find out the truth. You will wait for me as we arranged."

The two friends, talking as they walked along, had by this time reached the Place Moncey.

"There is the Avenue de Clichy," said the doctor, "and that Rue Ganneron which runs to the cemetery must be the third or fourth turning on the right. If I did not fear being surprised by Pontaurmur, I should propose going to have a look at the house."

"It is possible that I may do so later on," said Courtenay, "but the time has not yet come for that. Let us go on. The Rue Blanche isn't far off, and Mademoiselle Mezenc must be home by now."

Coulanges made no objection. He also wished to end the uncertainty as soon as possible. They picked their way among the tram-cars and omnibuses, which passed in all directions, and when they were half-way across the Place, the doctor was accosted by one of his lady patients, who had been looking for a seat in an omnibus, and was in despair at finding all the vehicles full. Courtenay witnessed the meeting and kept on his way, leaving Coulanges to free himself as best he could. The doctor soon succeeded in getting rid of his patient, but Courtenay was already at the corner of the Rue de Douai, just as Coulanges reached a post and telegraph office, about half-way between the above-mentioned street and the Place Moncey. As he passed a woman came out of this office—a woman who, on seeing him, hastily lowered her veil, and hurried across the street at the risk of being run over by a passing vehicle. Coulanges, however, had had time to recognise her, and he stopped short in amazement.

Only a few moments before he had still hesitated to believe that Mademoiselle Mezenc had taken any active part in the attempt to murder Madame Bréhal, but he could no longer doubt the truth

after what he had seen upon her face. He did not commit the mistake of running after Mademoiselle Mezenc, in fact he even had the presence of mind not to turn and watch her. All had taken place so quickly that she might well believe that the doctor had not recognised her, although for a moment he had been almost face to face with her. He could not desire anything more suited to his views, and he hastened forward in view of overtaking Courtenay, whom she had certainly not perceived.

"You will never change," said George, as Coulanges joined him. "You stop to speak to every woman you meet."

"You need not complain of the one who just spoke to me. You are indebted to her for knowledge of the part which Mademoiselle Mezenc played in the attempt against Madame Bréhal."

"What nonsense are you talking now?"

"I just met Mademoiselle Mezenc at the door of the telegraph office, which you passed two minutes before me."

"Did you speak to her?"

"I wasn't such a fool. I pretended not to see her, and she hurried away. She was going towards the Place Moncey I noticed, but she cannot be very far off, and we had better walk fast, for she might have the idea of turning back, and we must not let her know that you were ahead of me. It was lucky that you turned down this street. She might have recognised you from behind."

"If she had, what then?"

"Come, I tell you, come quickly, and when we are safe in the Rue de Bruxelles I will explain myself."

Courtenay submitted, and when they had turned out of the Rue de Douai, the doctor said: "I was wrong, perhaps. In fact, she would not think of following me, for she longed to get away from me. We can talk now, however, and I will begin by telling you that Delphine correctly described the dress of the person who visits the house in the Rue de Ganneron—black gown, thick veil——"

"Not so very thick, since her face was not invisible."

"She had raised it, probably to speak to the telegraph-clerks; however, quickly as she lowered it, I had time to notice that her face bore the mark which was given her by Madame Bréhal's coachman. The coachman won't need to look for the young fellow who dropped that bullet into Max's ear. I have found him myself, this spurious youth, although he has changed his costume. Yes, my dear fellow, Mademoiselle Mezenc dressed herself in a blouse, so as to perform the operation in person, I'm sure of it. The mark she bears could only have been made by a whip. I am positive of that; I would swear to it in court. Now, draw your own conclusions."

"The woman is a monster!"

"Yes, that term is not too harsh. Yes, she is a monster of wickedness and hypocrisy! What must she be to try and kill Madame Bréhal, who has loaded her with favours, and to go and meet her lover close to the cemetery where her betrothed lies



buried? Ah! she must be very clever to know how to commit so many crimes without any one suspecting her, save ourselves, and even we were reproaching ourselves just now for doubting her innocence. At present we are certain of the truth, and yet we can do nothing against her; she is a woman, and certain of impunity."

"You are mistaken. Her punishment will come," said George.

"The only one which you could inflict upon her would be to tell her protectress that she is unworthy of her kindness; but that would not do her much harm, for I don't suppose that she cares to meet the woman you are going to marry. Well, there is no longer any need of going to the Rue Blanche, and I congratulate you."

"You need not congratulate me. I am going there."

"What! you still wish to deliver Madame Bréhal's message? You are going to act as if you did not know Mademoiselle Mezenc's real character! True, you need not fear meeting her at home, as I have just seen her in the street, but if she should return——"

"I wish to see her. I must. Before condemning her, I want to have a proof I lack, a proof of another crime, more horrible still. Wait for me as we arranged."

Coulanges could not understand his friend, but he realised that he had conceived some plan which all the reasoning and all the exhortations in the world would not prevent him from executing. He accordingly followed Courtenay to the Place Blanche and took up a position before a shop window, while George quickly descended the street and entered the house where the Mezencs resided.

He knew very well what he was going to do. He resolutely mounted the staircase, and on reaching the third floor he rang.

"Will you ask Madame Mezenc if she can receive me?" he said to the maid who opened the door.

"Madame is not very well, and mademoiselle is out, but she will soon return," answered the girl. "If you will wait in the studio for a moment, sir, madame will join you there."

This suited George exactly, who cared less about seeing Madame Mezenc than the room where Marianne worked. The maid conducted him there and left him alone. Nothing had changed in the studio since the day he had entered it before. He again saw the high-backed chair at which Maurice's betrothed had sat in an attitude of sorrow, the easels, the faded curtains, and the lathe which had been used to turn the legs of the famous chiffonier. He had come for the express purpose of examining this lathe, and he went straight up to it. It did not appear to have been used recently. The shavings had been swept up, but the dust lay thick upon the tools which encumbered the table.

Courtenay saw all this at a glance, and on one corner of the lathe he perceived a box in which nails, screws, tacks, &c., had been cast pell-mell. He took up this box and shook it. "At last!" he murmured. "I knew that I should find this last proof."

Under the nails there were some leaden bullets and some wooden

balls. Both were of the same size, but almost all the wooden balls had some slight defect. Three or four only were perfectly round, and these were covered with a thin layer of metallic paper, to give them the appearance of lead. Without any hesitation Courtenay put two of the real bullets and two of the false ones into his pocket, noiselessly gained the outer door of the flat, and descended the stairs more quickly than he had climbed them. In five minutes more he came upon Coulanges, who was pacing up and down the pavement.

"I have it!" said George, quietly.

"What?" asked the puzzled doctor.

"The proof that Mademoiselle Mezenc helped her lover, Pontaurmur, to murder her betrothed. It was she who manufactured with her own hands the false bullet with which Corléon loaded the pistol our friend used. Look! Here are some like it. I discovered them in her studio."

"A jury would find her guilty on nothing but this," exclaimed Coulanges, after turning the bullets over and over again.

"And we also condemn her, do we not?"

"I have done so some time ago. She and her odious accomplices have twice deserved death; however, it is not in our power to apply the penalty. Let us forget these wretches; you content yourself with being happy with the lovely woman they wished to kill."

"Do you imagine, then, that they will let her live?"

"I think they would try again if they could, but I defy them to do so. They cannot get into her sick room."

"For how long will she remain there, doctor?"

"For sixty days, at least. I shall watch over her there, and when she goes out again you will do so."

"Will you promise me that during those sixty days no one shall approach her, and will you forbid her receiving any communication from outside, under pretext that the slightest emotion would be injurious? You are a physician. She has confidence in you."

"I can do that, but why?"

"Promise me that you will do it."

"Well, I promise; but tell me your purpose in all this."

"You shall know everything when the purpose is attained, and that will soon happen."

"But, in the meanwhile?"

"In the meanwhile, my friend, don't ask me anything, don't be astonished at anything that happens. Let it suffice for you to know that in order to avenge Maurice, I'm going to do what Maurice himself would have done if they had not killed him; you yourself said so. Farewell. Not a word to Madame Bréhal."

"He is crazy," thought Coulanges, as George walked away.

But George was not crazy. Never, on the contrary, had he been more clear-headed, more completely master of himself, and more resolute. He had formed his plans, and if he had hurriedly gone to speak to his friend, it was because he had not a minute to lose to

indicate the course which must be adopted in regard to Madame Bréhal. But he had not finished with Mademoiselle Mezenc.

While Coulanges was thoughtfully wending his way back towards the Avenue de Villiers, George ran down the Rue Blanche again, and hastily climbed the staircase which led to the Mezencs' apartment. He hoped to get back before his short absence had been noticed ; and in this hope he had even left the door ajar ; but he found it closed, and he was obliged to ring.

"Mademoiselle has returned," said the maid. "She knows that you called, sir, and she greatly regretted not having seen you."

Everything happened exactly as George desired it, for he no longer cared to see the mother since he had discovered the wooden bullets. He wondered how Mademoiselle Mezenc would receive him, but he knew what he meant to say to her ; his words were prepared.

The servant ushered him into the drawing-room, and went to inform her young mistress of his arrival. He was kept waiting some time, and he divined the reason. "She is arranging her face," he thought, bitterly. "She hopes I shall not see the mark of the whp."

He was not mistaken. A quarter of an hour elapsed before Mademoiselle Mezenc appeared, and he saw at the first glance that, thanks to a skilful application of powder, the mark was now scarcely apparent, that mark which the doctor had seen in full daylight, whereas the drawing-room was lighted by a single window, which looked out on to a court. Mademoiselle Mezenc had not changed her dress, and she appeared very calm. Her eyes alone reflected a slight feeling of uneasiness, and George realised that she was wondering why he had come.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "I left here just now greatly regretting that I had not found you at home. I feared to disturb your mother ; but I remembered in the street that your maid had told me that you would soon return, and as I particularly desired to see you to-day, I came back."

"Your desire flatters me, certainly," replied Mademoiselle Mezenc with pronounced coldness, "but pray tell me the reason of it."

"Cannot you guess that I have come from Madame Bréhal ? Don't you know that she has met with a serious accident ?"

"No, I was not aware of it," she answered, without the quiver of an eyelid. "What has happened to her ?"

"Her horse ran away with her last night as she was leaving the opera, and she has broken both her legs."

"I pity her with all my heart, and I pity you also, sir. This will delay your marriage."

"My marriage ? It will never take place."

"Ah !" ejaculated Mademoiselle Mezenc, calmly. "You have changed your mind very quickly, then. It was only on the day before yesterday that Madame Bréhal announced it."

"It is not certain whether she will survive her injuries, and even

if she does, she will remain a cripple. She knows it, and has released me from my promise."

"That is very generous on her part. Is this the news you were so desirous of telling me?"

"Yes, for you had suddenly ceased to come to Madame Bréhal's house, and I thought that the premature announcement made to you in the marble pavilion had perhaps influenced you——"

A gleam shone in Marianne Mezenc's eyes. "And if it were so?" she said, looking Courtenay full in the face.

"If it were so, mademoiselle, I should dare to confess that I was deceived as to my real sentiments. I certainly thought for an instant that I loved Madame Bréhal, and she thought that she loved me. But we have both discovered that we were mistaken."

"A strange error, really. I have always known whom I loved."

"Because you have never experienced the illusions of worldly life—because you have only listened to your own heart. From constantly hearing that we were a well-assorted couple, both as regards age and position, we ended by persuading ourselves, Madame Bréhal and I, that we ought to marry. The accident which has happened to her has opened our eyes, however, and with common accord we have decided to remain mere friends as in the past."

"Indeed, sir; but why have you judged me worthy of receiving this confidential information?"

"You ask me that? Have you then forgotten our interview in this studio, which I entered a short time ago, and fled from, because the memory of a vanished hope oppressed me?"

"No, I have not forgotten it," murmured Marianne, with unfeigned emotion, for she now understood George's purpose.

"It has never left my memory, that scene in which courage failed you, and in which I lacked proper frankness. But our unfortunate friend was dead, and his image rose up between us. How could we confess what we both felt? His body was not yet cold; but how many times since then have I reproached myself for having hidden from you the avowal which Maurice made to me as he expired."

"What did he say to you?" asked the girl, almost in a whisper.

"He said to me—you will pardon my repeating those last words, which were almost a prayer—he said to me, while I was speaking of your love for him—he said: 'It is you she loves.'"

Mademoiselle Mezenc turned very pale, but she managed to answer: "He told you the truth."

"Ah!" cried Courtenay. "Then I can at last tell you that I also loved you, and that I bitterly reproached myself for loving you—you, the affianced of my best friend. I shuddered at not being able to conquer this love, which seemed to me a wicked one. I swore never to see you again, and to cure myself. It was with that object that I bound myself by a promise, but I had no sooner promised Madame Bréhal to marry her than I regretted it. When your pallor revealed to me the noble sentiments which made you so

resigned ; when I heard you proudly refuse Maurice's bequest, then I cursed my weakness, and I almost fell at your feet——"

"I could suffer without complaint, but I would not see again the woman you preferred to me."

"But you can do so now. I am free, and I have come to say to you : 'Marianne, will you be my wife?'"

"You marry me—you ? No, no ; it is impossible. You are trying me by speaking so, and it is cruel of you. I do not deserve it."

"Will you believe me if I ask you to allow me to hand in your name and mine at the mayor's office at once ? Answer yes, and we will be married in ten days from now, as soon as the law allows."

"So quickly ?"

"Yes ; for I have no one's consent to ask, and I hope that Madame Mezenc will not refuse hers."

"My mother will do what I wish, but Madame Bréhal——"

"Do not mention Madame Bréhal's name ! I foresaw that you would speak of her, and have no doubt but what you share my opinion, that she must know nothing ; we ought, at least, not to wound her pride. It will be easy, for this accident will keep her at home. I will arrange with the physician to forbid all visits or letters. Besides, we will not be married secretly, though we will be married without any display. We will find some discreet witnesses, and invite no one. Four days after the ceremony we will start for Scotland or Switzerland, and remain there till the end of July ; and on our return I will present Madame Courtenay to Madame Bréhal, who will receive her cordially, for she has never loved me, and she will have had time to forget any injury done to her vanity."

"You are right in thinking of what it would cost me to hurt her feelings. She has always been goodness itself to me," murmured Mademoiselle Mezenc.

"She acknowledges it, the infamous creature !" thought George ; however, he said aloud : "You accept, then ?"

"Yes, on one condition—on condition that you will not speak of our engagement to Dr. Coulanges."

"I will abstain from doing so. He cannot keep a secret, I know, and he would repeat everything to Madame Bréhal."

"And I ask you, also, not to force me to accept the fortune left me by the poor fellow who was our friend."

George turned white with indignation. He thought of the grave in which Maurice lay murdered, that grave which the murderer and his accomplice could see from the windows of the house in the Rue Ganneron ! However, he had self-control enough to answer quietly : "I understand your scruples, and I leave you free to do as you please. But is it not time to ask your mother's consent ?"

"Come !" she said, holding out her hand. Then he followed her to Madame Mezenc's room ; and while Marianne was thinking : "At last he is mine ! His fortune is mine !" George was saying to himself : "Maurice, you shall be avenged !"

## XII.

A FORTNIGHT had gone by. Madame Bréhal was still in bed, but hers was no longer a bed of suffering ; it was one of repose. When fractures are simple they are not dangerous, and the illustrious surgeon whom Coulanges seconded with so much zeal had had an easy task as regards the setting. Unfortunately he could not restore to his patient the immediate use of her limbs ; science could do nothing in that respect ; time was necessary, nearly two months, and Madame Bréhal still had six weeks' enforced inaction before her.

She bore her seclusion cheerfully, and her friends did all they could to amuse her. George came every morning and every evening, and his constant attentions sufficed to console her. Coulanges, moreover, who had not the same reasons for devotion, never quitted her, so to speak.

He breakfasted and dined at the house in the Avenue de Villiers, and if he ventured to absent himself for a few minutes to smoke a cigar, he went to do so in the grounds near the marble pavilion. He really enjoyed this quiet life, so contrary to his usual habits.

At the outset it was not for his own pleasure that he embraced the charitable but scarcely lucrative profession of nurse. He did so out of devotion to George, for, after lively discussions, he had ended by entering into the ideas of Maurice Saulieu's avenger, and he had consented to help him in his projects, hardy and impracticable as they appeared. And, his resolution once taken, he had begun to play the part which fell to him in the new scheme.

To begin with, he had managed to obtain from Madame Bréhal a request that he would establish himself at her house almost permanently. He was a physician, and was therefore free to prescribe for his patient a particular mode of life, under the pretext that it was necessary to insure her recovery. He thus abused his authority by forbidding her any kind of excitement or fatigue. No visitors, no newspaper reading ; visitors worry one, and the papers are full of frightful crimes, the perusal of which causes unhealthy sensations. No correspondence, either, as letter writing, so he said, infallibly congests the brain. To write is toil, and each letter received excites a convalescent. A two hours' visit from George each day, and nothing more, such was the doctor's fiat ; nothing retards recovery like over frequent and prolonged interviews with the man one loves. In a word, Madame Bréhal was condemned to absolute repose.

Such were the doctor's orders for this very special case, and he had been clever enough to obtain from the eminent surgeon a pro-

mise not to over-ride these somewhat unusual prescriptions. He had persuaded this prince of science that Madame Bréhal was an exceptionally nervous subject, and it was necessary to subject her to complete sequestration. And the patient had submitted to all the prohibitions imposed upon her. She had even anticipated Coulanges' intentions, for, on the day after the accident, she had denied herself to every one. Her friends were society friends, such as a person meets with pleasure but does not receive intimately. She had no relatives, and cared but little about her acquaintances.

She only regretted Marianne Mezenc, and it would have been difficult to have prevented her from seeing her, if Marianne had yielded to the request which George Courtenay had been charged with. But Madame Bréhal knew that the embassy had failed. George, without explaining himself fully, had let her understand that Mademoiselle Mczenc entertained hostile sentiments, the origin of which it was better not to search for, for fear of discovering that the girl did not merit the interest which Madame Bréhal had taken in her. Thus the young widow, wounded by so much ingratitude, spoke no more of Marianne.

There were also the servants, whose silence it was necessary to insure, in order that nothing should trouble her peace. Courtenay had warned his people that he would at once dismiss any of them who ventured to speak of his actions, or who set foot, under any pretext, in the house of the Avenue de Villiers, or even conversed with Madame Bréhal's people, if they met. And as Courtenay's retainers were devoted ones, it seemed certain that they would take good care to obey their orders.

Madame Bréhal's servants, also, were too well trained to be guilty of any indiscretion, and, besides, they no longer saw her. Her maid alone had permission to approach her; and this confidential servant was a very intelligent person. "On the day your mistress is quite well again," the doctor had said to her, "Monsieur Courtenay will hand you two thousand francs, providing that while she keeps her room no news from outside reaches her ears. To earn this reward you must be silent, whatever you may hear. A careless word might make you lose your money, and kill Madame Bréhal." And so the woman was silent, well knowing that the doctor was a man of his word, and that the promise thus made would be kept.

Thus the patient was as ignorant of what was taking place in Paris as if she had been shut up in the palace of the Emperor of China. And Paris was already thinking very little of her, although the accident which had happened to her had created a sensation. It was reported that she was much more dangerously hurt than she really was; that it was the doctor's opinion that she would never recover the use of her limbs; and as a cripple is of no use in society, the people whom she received, thinking that her house would never be opened again, consoled themselves by taking their tea elsewhere.

Everything was, therefore, progressing in the best possible

manner. Courtenay had no doubt of the success of his exceedingly dangerous project. This scheme was arranged; the drama was being rapidly enacted, and the finish was approaching. The first scene of the last act had even been played already, but success depended upon the final scene, and Coulanges viewed the arrival of the decisive moment with no little alarm. He was at times even tormented by remorse, and reproached himself for not having dissuaded his friend from his design.

For the last three days especially the cheerful doctor had been almost melancholy, and this change, which Madame Bréhal had noticed, had coincided with George's absence, which, by the way, greatly disturbed the lady of the Avenue de Villiers. It was in vain that Coulanges displayed unusual care and solicitude, he could not distract her; and one morning, while he was trying to cheer her up, and succeeding less than ever, she said to him: "Doctor, you are a very good fellow, but be frank: George no longer loves me."

"I would rather confess that I had poisoned one of my patients," exclaimed Coulanges. "George adores you."

"I should like to be mistaken, doctor, but my womanly instinct never deceives me. In the first place, George is no longer the same. When he comes here his mind is far away, and he does not come as regularly as he used. On the day before yesterday I did not see him all day, yesterday he remained only ten minutes here, and to-day, you see," she continued, glancing at the clock, "it is already noon. The hour for his morning visit has gone by. He will not come."

"Didn't he tell you that he had some business to attend to?"

"Yes, and it is precisely that which troubles me. George, I know, has no business affairs. He has simply availed himself of a pretext, and when a lover does that it is a grave symptom."

"I protest, both as George's friend and as a physician, madame. Your diagnosis of the case is erroneous."

"I do not pretend to oppose my science to yours, but do you believe in presentiments?"

"Not in the least."

"I do. And I am assailed by the idea that my happiness is threatened. If I told you that last night I dreamed I saw George making love to another woman, you would laugh, no doubt?"

"No, but I should try to show you that you were accusing him wrongfully. George only loves you—you alone. Other women do not exist for him. George, my dear madame, is a fine case of exclusive love in the acute stage, a complaint I have never had."

"You are laughing. But I know that my destiny is being decided at this moment; my heart tells me so."

"George will soon show you that there is no ground for your fears, and that he has spent the morning with his notary."

"I should like to be sure of it."

"How can I procure for you that certainty? Would you like me to find him for you, so that he may justify himself?"



"I did not dare to ask you, but, since you have offered to do so, I really wish you would go, my dear doctor--go where you think you will find George, and bring him to me. His absence worries me."

Coulanges reflected for an instant, and then rising up, he said: "Your wishes are laws for me, my dear Madame. I will go."

"Thanks! How kind you are!" murmured Madame Bréhal. "But don't take him unawares," she added, gaily. "Warn him that he is going to appear before his judge, and that I wish him to tell me in detail all that he has done during the last three days."

The doctor bowed without answering. He was thinking: "He won't tell her everything in detail; for he was married to Mademoiselle Mezenc on the day before yesterday!"

He then took his leave, to Madame Bréhal's delight, for the desire to see George had seized upon her suddenly, as a whim does seize upon an invalid, and she wished to satisfy her desire at any cost. It must be added that in this case the doctor willingly complied with her desire, for he also felt uneasy, with good reason.

Courtenay had married Mademoiselle Mezenc two days before; and on the morning of his marriage he had had a short but important interview with the doctor. The ceremony had been a purely civil one, and Marianne had even agreed to remain at her mother's pending their departure for Scotland, which was to take place in a few days' time. George had pointed out that a temporary sojourn at his house in the Rue de Milan would be attended with inconvenience, adding that he meant to have everything arranged there while they were abroad. Marianne had approved of what he said, and had not even raised any objection as to the delay in starting on the trip which it is customary for a newly-wedded pair to take. She had not raised any objection, we say, although this deferred the rise of the honeymoon. Now that the happiness she had dreamt of was at hand, she did not seem in any hurry to enjoy it. She had acted as if she considered it quite natural on his part, when, after the ceremony, which had been a very quiet affair, he took her back to her mother's house, and then asked permission to go and attend to sundry business affairs which required looking after, so he asserted, as the honeymoon trip would keep them two months away.

All this was passing strange; and Coulanges, upon hearing of it, had marvelled greatly, wondering if this woman merely displayed such ready compliance because she was plotting some fresh act of perfidy. Moreover, the doctor knew how George meant to punish Maurice's murderers, and, although he had tried to turn him from his project, he was beginning to feel his moral responsibility weigh heavily upon him.

"George told me how he passed his time yesterday," he thought, as he left Madame Bréhal's house, "and the day ended uneventfully. Will it be the same to-day? I hardly think so. George has not appeared this morning. That is a bad sign. I must find him, and his valet will no doubt be able to tell me where he has gone."

God grant that there may still be time to prevent a catastrophe, for the more I reflect upon it, the more I fear that his terrible revenge will cost him dear. It is all very fine to become an instrument to punish the guilty whom the law cannot reach, but the idea may be carried too far. I have not always advocated the employment of gentle means. I was indignant against these two criminals, and I allowed myself to be persuaded by Courtenay. Now, however, I think he made a mistake in marrying that woman. At all events a divorce will be the best termination of the affair."

Thus cogitating, Coulanges took a cab and drove to the Rue de Milan. He there found his friend's valet, and he noticed at once that this man, who had served Courtenay for ten years, had a troubled countenance. He had no need to question him, for the servant asked him point-blank: "Has any misfortune happened to my master, sir?"

"Not that I know of," answered Coulanges. "Why?"

"I thought that you were with him, sir, and seeing you alone——"

"Explain yourself more clearly; I do not understand."

"I mean that my master had an affair—a duel, on this morning."

"How did you get hold of that idea?"

"Why, sir, my master passed a part of the night in writing, and he did not go to bed. I found that out this morning."

"If you have no other reason for thinking that Monsieur Courtenay fought a duel this morning——"

"Excuse me, sir. I saw my master loading some pistols."

Coulanges turned pale. He remembered that George had come to him the day before to ask for the pistols with which Maurice Saulieu had been killed, and had, in his presence, tried the leaden and wooden bullets which he had found in Mademoiselle Mezenec's studio. They had both seen that these projectiles exactly fitted the weapons purchased in Monsieur Corléon's presence. George had not said what he meant to do, but Coulanges had guessed it, and had offered no opposition to his taking the pistols. It had seemed to him fitting that George should use them to punish the murderers. He now, however, looked at things from a different point of view.

"And then this is not all," continued the valet. "Before going out, my master told me that if he did not return I was to send you, to-morrow morning, a letter which he left upon the mantelpiece. If you wish to see it, sir——"

Coulanges hesitated for an instant, but reflected that he had a right to read this letter even before the appointed time.

The valet brought it to him in the court-yard, where he had stopped, having no time to lose. It ran as follows:—"My dear friend,—It will take place this morning between eleven and twelve. Yesterday, after I left you, I surprised a note from Monsieur de P. which leaves me no further doubt. My measures are taken. They cannot escape me. But that will not be all. The consequences of the act of justice I am about to accomplish are

inevitable, and I accept them in advance. After this I shall probably not be able to see Madame Bréhal, because I shall not be free, and it is important that she should be informed of the facts which dictated my resolution. You alone are the person to tell her what it is necessary for her to know, so that she may judge my conduct. I rely upon you, and I am certain that, after hearing you, she will forgive me. Need I add that the secret must remain for ever between us three? I do not know when I shall see you again, but I hope that I shall not be forbidden to communicate with you. I feel calm, for I have thought it all over, and I am sure that my conscience will not reproach me. I have judged and absolved myself."

"May the jury do the same!" thought Coulanges, who was not very easy in mind. "But we have not come to that as yet, and I will not wait till to-morrow to find out where he is."

"Have you any message for my master, sir?" asked the valet.

"No, no—only it is possible that he may not return here this evening. Come to my house to-morrow morning; I will tell you what to do," said the doctor, hurriedly re-entering his cab. Before doing so, however, he looked at his watch and saw that it was half-past twelve. The hour indicated by George was past; the tragedy must have been enacted, if it were to be enacted that day.

"Never mind," thought Coulanges. "I have promised Madame Bréhal. I must at all costs put an end to the present situation, which has become unbearable. I shall arrive too late, but at least I shall find out something." And then he cried to his driver:

"Avenue de Clichy! I do not remember the number, but I will stop you at the proper time."

Coulanges had only seen the entrance of this Avenue de Clichy on the day when he met Mademoiselle Mezenc near there, leaving the telegraph office. However, he well remembered the description given that same day by Delphine du Raincy, and he knew that the house where the guilty couple met was situated at the end of a street which led from the avenue to the Montmartre cemetery. Courtenay, also, had described to him the exterior of this house, saying that he had obtained the means of entering it, though he had not stated what this means was. The next house not being inhabited, however—that is, if Delphine were to be believed—the doctor supposed that George had hired it, in view of surprising the culprits, and he regretted that he had not thought of opposing the idea. According to French law, a husband profits by the so-called "legal excuse," if by chance he surprises his wife with a lover *in flagrante delicto* and then wreaks vengeance upon the culprits, but matters change if this husband pre-arranges the surprise, and then takes the law into his own hands. In that case juries often fail to acquit the husband.

"They may condemn him to ten years' imprisonment," thought Coulanges, with anguish, "and then Madame Bréhal would die of sorrow. Fool—yes, fool! that I was not to have stopped him!"

When the cab reached the Place Moncey, he told the driver to walk his horse up the avenue, keeping to the right. In his worry he had forgotten the name of the street where the house was, but he hoped he would recognise it by reading the inscriptions ; and, indeed, after passing several streets with odd appellations, he found the one he wanted. "Rue Ganneron, that is it," he thought. And he judged that it would be as well to leave the vehicle.

Detectives always operate on foot, and for good reasons ; they cannot stroll about, chat, obtain information, or profit by a chance encounter, if they are in a cab.

Coulanges had no sooner left his conveyance than he congratulated himself on having done so. The Rue Ganneron ascended so steeply that the horse would have had some difficulty in mounting it, and the noise of the wheels would have drawn the inhabitants of this little frequented place to their windows. The doctor walked on, examining the houses and shops, and trying to give himself the appearance of a gentleman who was seeking lodgings.

At a hundred paces from the Avenue de Clichy the ascent ceased, and at this point he could perceive at the end of the street a grey wall, above which appeared the trees of the cemetery. The house must be on the left hand side, and the doctor saw with no little satisfaction that there was no crowd before the door.

"If there had been a murder or simply a violent scene the whole quarter would be in an uproar. The woman did not go, perhaps—still she may come, and George is doubtless watching for her. I have arrived in time to prevent him from blowing her brains out with the pistol which killed Maurice. It would be more than a crime—it would be madness, and would cost him dear. The thing is to find out where he is hiding, and how to get at him. I will commence by questioning that greengrocer to whom Delphine spoke."

The woman was at her door cooking artichokes, and the doctor had no difficulty in entering into conversation with her, for she called out to him to offer him her vegetables. He asked her if she were not charged with letting a house in the neighbourhood, and, on account of his surmises in reference to Courtenay's proceedings, he expected to learn that she had recently found a tenant. However, to his great surprise, she replied : "Yes, sir, at your service. It has been vacant these two years. Eight quarters' rent lost for my nephew, who is a market gardener at Argenteuil. If it suits you you can have it cheap, for my nephew has had enough of paying the taxes without getting a sou's rent. It is not a palace, of course, but it isn't a bad house ; there is a bit of a garden and a place to keep a horse and trap. But I cannot show it to you to-day. My nephew came yesterday, and he forgot to leave me the key."

"I will return to-morrow," said Coulanges, who was delighted to learn that Courtenay had not compromised himself in this dangerous neighbourhood. "But I can give a glance at it from the street?"

"Oh, that is easy. You can see it from here, next to the house

with the green shutters, which is at the corner. That one has been let for a long time, and it belongs to a Madame Fresnay, who's very well off. It is a true saying that only rich people have any luck."

The conversation was here interrupted by the arrival of a customer, and the woman entered her shop to serve him.

Coulanges, who had obtained all the information he wanted, called out to her that he would return, and went on his way. It was not the house which was to let that he wished to see, he desired to examine the other one—that in which Pontaumur received his unworthy mistress.

The house was two storeys high, with six windows furnished with green shutters, which were tightly closed, as well as the door.

Coulanges did not commit the imprudence of stopping.

The greengrocer might reappear, and he did not wish her to see him contemplating the house. He noted that the street turned at right angles, continuing to the left, past the wall of the cemetery. Thus the house, which was at the corner, must have another front, and Coulanges had only to turn the corner to be shielded from the prying eyes of the shopwoman. This he did, and he saw that on the other side the corner house had no windows; the tenants lost nothing by this, however, for there was nothing to be seen save the wall of the graveyard. However, there was a door, a large double door, which probably gave admission to a court-yard. Farther on, only stone walls could be seen; and the street was deserted.

"It was, perhaps, by that door that Courtenay intended to surprise them," said the doctor to himself. "The place is well arranged for anything of that sort; a man could escape this way without meeting any one. Pontaumur doesn't fear burglars apparently—perhaps he never sleeps here—and yet I met him late at night roaming about the Boulevard Berthier, and that is not so very far from here. But what is the use of thinking anything more about it? I have seen all that I can see, and I feel easier. I have now only to find Courtenay, who must be either at home or at Madame Bréhal's."

He was about to retrace his steps when the idea came to him of seeing if there were a crack in the door through which he might peep. As long as he was there, there would be no harm in doing that, and there was seemingly no danger of his being observed.

He therefore approached, gliding along the wall, and looked for a crack to apply his eye to, when suddenly he perceived that the door was ajar, and at this discovery he started back in amazement. What! Pontaumur, who guarded himself so well, had neglected to barricade this entrance! It was incomprehensible, and Coulanges immediately indulged in other suppositions. "Can George have gone out that way and have forgotten to lock the door behind him?"

On examining the lock, however, he saw that the key had not been left in it, if indeed a key had been used to enter the place. Indeed, the lock was bent and battered as if it had been forced.

"Stranger and stranger," thought the doctor. "It is impossible that Courtenay can have done this."

The door-way, as he had supposed, was that of a court-yard, and upon looking in, he saw that this court-yard was kept in good order. Long rows of boxes full of flowers gave it the appearance of a garden, and the inner side of the house was covered with creepers. From the outside, no one would have suspected such a pretty arrangement.

Coulanges was debating whether he should carry his investigation further, when, on raising his hand, which had been resting against the door, he saw some blood upon his fingers. He could not believe his eyes, and yet it really was blood which stained his hand. A physician cannot make a mistake in such a case. He at once examined the door, and saw that it bore some large bloody stains.

"I have arrived too late," he murmured. "The murderer fled this way, and not long ago, for the marks which he left are still quite fresh. He evidently took this street, past the cemetery, and that is why I did not meet him. But this murderer is not, cannot be George. He borrowed the duelling pistols of me, and intended to use them; when a man kills another at a distance, he is not covered with blood, and doesn't mark everything he touches."

Reason advised Coulanges to go off, and not mix himself up in an affair in which he might be greatly compromised; but, on the other hand, a feverish desire to know what had taken place impelled him to enter the yard. "I must warn Courtenay," he thought; "and I cannot tell him anything positive if I do not explore the house."

From the spot where he was standing, he saw on his left a flight of steps, and on these steps there were two or three flower-pots overturned; one of them, in fact, was broken in pieces. The murderer had doubtless knocked them down as he had rushed out of the house, and if he had fled like that, he must have feared being caught.

An idea then came to Coulanges—an idea which drove all the colour from his face. "Suppose that blood is George's, and that Pontaumur killed him! The scoundrel is quite capable of using a dagger, and he is much stronger than George; besides, he had a right to defend himself, if George appeared pistol in hand."

Without further hesitation, Coulanges then entered the court-yard, and went straight towards the flight of steps which led to the interior of the house. He stopped for an instant to listen on the threshold, and, hearing no sound, he entered.

A paved hall led to a staircase covered with a new carpet; and upon this carpet, upon the banisters, and upon the painted walls, Coulanges again saw some red stains.

The doctor had now advanced too far to retreat, and he conquered the disgust which he felt at walking, so to speak, in blood, and mounted the stairs. When he reached the poorly-lighted landing, he almost stumbled over a body stretched across it, and on regaining his footing, he saw that this body was a woman's. "She!" he cried in amazement.

His eyes had become accustomed to the dim light, and in the woman at his feet he recognised Marianne Mezenc.

She had been killed by a single slash across the left side of her throat—a slash given by some one who knew very well how to sever the carotid artery. She had not defended herself; her garments were not in disorder; in fact, she must have been surprised at the very moment she arrived, for the strings of her bonnet were not untied, and her veil was half down.

“It was not George who killed her thus.” Such was the doctor’s first thought; and, in fact, it was impossible to admit that Courtenay had awaited Marianne at the top of the stairs to cut her throat before she met her lover. Then Coulanges wondered if Pontaumur had not committed still another crime.

He soon knew what to believe. Upon the landing there was a door, and he had only to push it open to behold a frightful spectacle.

At the foot of a tumbled bed, with his arms thrown out, Monsieur de Pontaumur was lying lifeless. He wore a night-dress, and he must have struggled with the energy of despair, for he was covered with wounds. The overturned chairs, the torn curtains, all indicated that he had only succumbed after a terrible combat, and that he had fought for his life against several assailants. One man alone could not have overcome this Hercules, and George had certainly taken no assistants to help him in wreaking vengeance upon the scoundrel. George must be innocent of the double murder; and the doctor had no difficulty in guessing what had really happened, for a secretary stood there broken open with a hatchet; the drawers had been pulled out, and papers were scattered about.

“I understand it all,” murmured Coulanges. “Some thieves, knowing that the house had been hired and furnished by a rich man who did not live in it, thought that they might reap a rich harvest. But when they found Pontaumur here—he had come to sleep here, no doubt—they attacked and killed him; and, after he was dead, they forced the secretary where he kept his money. During this operation, Pontaumur’s mistress arrived. She probably had a key of the little door in the Rue Ganneron. The murderers heard her coming up the stairs, and one of them met her and cut her throat as she reached the landing. They are far away by now, but if I had come in a quarter of an hour earlier, I should, perhaps, have fallen into their hands.”

This was very well reasoned, but the doctor had momentarily forgotten that he ran another danger almost as serious as the one he mentioned, and he suddenly remembered it. “Good heavens!” he muttered, “if I were surprised here with those two dead bodies, I should find myself in a pretty predicament. The least that would happen to me would be arrest and a demand to explain what I was doing in this house. And George, also, would have his share of worry in that case, for it would be known that I am his best friend, and that he married Marianne Mezenc a day or two ago. There will be scandal enough as it is. At all events, George is now delivered from that woman.”

He did not stop to reflect any further, but quickly descended the stairs, and went out as he had come in, without encountering any one. The street was still deserted, but he judged it prudent not to pass the greengrocer's shop, as the woman might ask him some embarrassing questions. He accordingly went in the opposite direction, past the cemetery wall, without knowing exactly where the road led to. The great point was to avoid being remarked in this neighbourhood, and he regretted not having dismissed his cab, which he could not leave without paying; his mistake necessitated his showing himself again in the Avenue de Clichy.

"What shall I do now?" he asked himself. "In the first place, I must find George, for I suppose that he has not given up his project, and if he entered the house now, he might encounter the police. But where is he? The hour he mentioned in his letter is past. He is late, still he will surely come."

The doctor, seized with uneasiness, almost ran along, and after going a considerable distance, he finally came out on the avenue. There he assumed a less hasty gait, in order not to attract the attention of the passers-by, and, going on, he found his driver, who was asleep on his box, and consequently in no way anxious as to the doings of his "fare." Coulanges awoke him, paid him, and then with great satisfaction saw him whip up his horse and drive off, without even turning his head.

"That fellow won't testify against me," thought the doctor. "He did not once look me in the face."

But this was the least of his worries, and he now began to walk up and down the sidewalk, without losing sight of the Rue Ganne-ron. He was still doing so, when suddenly a brougham stopped some fifty paces from him, and he saw Courtenay alight.

"At last!" he murmured, and he ran towards his friend.

"Why are you here?" asked George abruptly.

"I will tell you, but come away, come quickly! And since you have been so imprudent as to use your own carriage, let us take it and go to Madame Bréhal's without losing a minute." Then, as George showed an inclination to go on his way, Coulanges added: "They are dead. Maurice is avenged."

"You are deriding me!"

"No, I assure you. After having seen what I have, I am in no mood for jesting. They are dead, I tell you. They have been murdered."

"Who killed them, then?"

"Some people who evidently thought that they would find the house empty—they entered it to rob. Pontaurmur was in bed, and they stabbed him with their knives. She came after they had finished with him, and they cut her throat. If I had entered the place while they were at work, they would have treated me in the same fashion, and you, too, my dear fellow. We have had a narrow escape. But do not let us remain here, I pray."



"Why?" asked Courtenay, utterly amazed by these tidings.

"Why? Don't you understand that the crime may be discovered at any moment; and that we may be accused of having committed it? You must have been seen several times in the Rue Ganneron—you have probably been noticed there. I have just left it, and I spoke to a woman who keeps a shop, and who would certainly recognise me. Now, it will soon be known that one of the victims was your wife, and that you were this day in the neighbourhood of the house where she met her lover."

"No matter. I came to kill them."

"I know it, and it is fortunate that you arrived too late. I have reflected a great deal during the last two days, and I have bitterly reproached myself for not having dissuaded you from a senseless project. I went to your house this morning to tell you what I thought of it, and, when your valet gave me your letter, I feared that all was lost; the only hope was to reach the house before you. I hastened there, and found two dead bodies. The murderers, in escaping, neglected to close the door of the court-yard."

"It was by that I intended to enter. I had the key."

"How did you procure it?"

"One evening, when I was examining the house, I found it in the lock, where it had doubtless been forgotten, and I took it."

"Well, if it is still in your pocket, I advise you to throw it away; for it would look suspicious if it were found upon you. I hope you have not shown yourself this morning in the Rue Ganneron."

"No; I have been to my notary's and my banker's. I expected to be arrested this evening, and wanted to have my affairs in order. Besides, I did not wish to reach the house until she had got there."

"And you have the pistols with you?"

"Yes," said George. "I loaded them with the bullets I found in that woman's studio."

"You should at least have buttoned up your overcoat. I can see the pistols now, and you must get rid of them immediately."

"I cannot throw them into the street."

"No; but we are going to get into your carriage. You must leave them there, and I will take them home. Come!"

George, quite unnerved, let the doctor lead him to the brougham.

When they were seated in the carriage, Coulanges, who had pushed the pistols under the cushions and given the coachman Madame Bréhal's address, began as follows: "My dear fellow, you are more lucky than wise. You are rid of those wretches, and you have no murder upon your conscience. But you must prepare yourself for the consequences of all this. What are you going to say to the charming woman who is impatiently waiting for you? She is surprised at not seeing you as frequently as formerly. She sent me to look for you, and I promised to bring you back with me."

"I shall not tell her anything," answered George, abruptly.

"Well, I also am of opinion that it is best not to tell her, now,

that Marianne Mezene has been murdered, and that only two days ago this same Marianne Mezenec became Madame Courtenay. Such revelations as these would grievously upset her, and it is advisable to spare her all emotion. However, by-and-by, when she is better, you won't be able to hide what has happened from her. What then?"

"She loves me, and she will forgive me."

"Yes, I think she will. But I feel certain that if you had really killed that woman, Madame Bréhal would have refused to become your wife. The 'legal excuse' does for juries, but a murder is always a murder, and a woman does not marry a man with blood-stained hands. Ah! Courtenay, you must have been mad."

"Perhaps so."

"And I had lost my wits, for I ought to have pointed out to you the danger of that course. Fortunately, you have been spared this crime."

"Yes; but it will be all the more difficult for me to justify my conduct to Madame Bréhal. Will she believe that I only married that woman with the intention with which you are acquainted?"

"Well, you will have time to prove your affection. As doctor, I shall authorise you to pay constant visits, and between now and Madame Bréhal's recovery you will be able to prove your love."

"I am in such a state of mind that I would gladly defer seeing her. I need time to calm myself."

"You need not remain long with Madame Bréhal to-day. This time it will suffice if you simply show your face; but take my advice and don't defer this indispensable visit."

Courtenay, half persuaded, did not say anything further, and the friends soon arrived at the Avenue de Villiers, which is not very far from the Avenue de Cliehy. All was quiet as usual in the house, but at the top of the staircase they found the maid, who had been watching for their arrival.

"Ah, sir," she said, hurriedly, to the doctor, "it is time you arrived. My mistress is very agitated, and she has done nothing but ask for you."

"Well, announce us," rejoined Coulanges.

"Oh! she will be very glad to see you; but, first of all, sir, I must tell you something has happened since you went away, sir. The chemist sent the medicine you had prescribed, and my mistress opened the packet which I had placed on the table beside her bed—I didn't suspect anything in it, I assure you—but inside, with the medicine, my mistress found a letter."

"A letter!"

"Well, sir, I didn't see much of it, but it seemed to me to be in print. At all events, it greatly upset my mistress."

Courtenay and Coulanges exchanged glances. The same idea had occurred to both of them. The wretched creature who that morning had met her doom had probably planned some final act of perfidy against the noble woman who had befriended her. How she had managed to do so they could not tell; still it was probable that

she had succeeded in apprising Madame Bréhal of the fact that she, Marianne Mezenc, had become George Courtenay's wife. The friends could not consult in presence of the maid ; there was no help for it, they must enter the patient's room.

Madame Bréhal turned pale as she saw them, and, without a word, she allowed them to approach the bed. However, as George reached her side, she held out to him a sheet of paper, on which was printed the usual matrimonial formula : "Madame Mezenc has the honour to inform you of the marriage of her daughter, Made-moiselle Marianne Mezenc, with M. George Courtenay."

Madame Bréhal did not speak, but her eyes questioned George, who, having perused the announcement, answered : "It is true."

"And so you deceived me ?" said she. "I believed in your vows —ah ! how cruelly you have treated me ! I might have forgiven you if you had not hidden from me the fact that you loved her."

"I hated her !" rejoined George, in a husky voice.

"But you married her ?"

"Yes, because I wished to kill her. I had learnt that she had, for a long time, been the mistress of that scoundrel, Pontaumur ; and I wished that they should both die by my hand. A husband has the moral right to kill his wife if he surprises her with a lover——"

"And you married Marianne, intending to exercise that right ! Impossible ! No, no ; you have invented that story to justify your conduct as regards myself."

"I have told you the truth. I wished to hide it from you yet awhile, but that woman has rendered concealment impossible by sending you that notification of our marriage. She knew that the news would be a blow for you, and she sent it because she regretted having previously missed you."

"Missed me ?" ejaculated Madame Bréhal, in surprise.

"She tried to murder you. It was she who, disguised as a street loafer, dropped a bullet in your horse's ear, and made him bolt."

"The proof of this accusation ?"

"Ask Coulanges. He will show you the bullet picked up on the pavement where Max fell, and he will bear witness to the fact, that on the following day that woman still bore on her face the mark of the blow inflicted by your coachman's whip."

"That is true," said Coulanges, gravely.

"And that crime was not the first one. Maurice Saulieu was murdered, for that duel was a treacherous one. The pistol given to Maurice by a man named Corléon, who was Pontaumur's intimate friend, was simply loaded with a wooden bullet, and this bullet Maurice's betrothed fashioned with her own hands."

"She ? Marianne ? No ! no ! she is incapable of anything so infamous ! Why should she have done that ? Monsieur Saulieu adored her, and I—I was her devoted friend——"

"She would have spared you if you had not announced that you were going to marry me. But she resolved on your death when she

knew that you were about to take the place she coveted. She had already rid herself of Maurice, who stood in the way of her designs."

"So, according to your account, it was out of love for you——"

"Oh! she didn't love me; it was my fortune that she wanted. She wanted to become rich, and such was her eagerness that she consented to marry me almost in a clandestine fashion. She even promised not to inform you of our marriage; but I see that she did not keep her word. I ought to have expected that."

"Well, if all that you say is true, why have you come here?" asked Madame Bréhal, sadly. "You surely don't expect me to approve of your designs. No matter what the provocation may have been, those designs are abominable. I don't know, and I don't wish to know, if Mademoiselle Mezenc is, or has been, the mistress of that man Pontamur; but I know this, that if you stain your hands with her blood or his, I will never consent to see you again."

"That woman and her accomplice are dead," answered George.

"You have killed them!" said Madame Bréhal, shuddering.

"No; but Coulanges will tell you what he has just seen."

The doctor was expecting to be called upon by his friend, and he was prepared. Clearly and succinctly, but omitting all repugnant details, he related the story of his expedition which had terminated with such a ghastly discovery. He did not forget to mention the feelings which had led him to undertake this expedition; he congratulated himself on having arrived in time, and he pointed out the manifest intervention of Providence in the punishment of the guilty couple. His conclusion was that Courtenay ought to keep quiet until the crime was discovered, and then answer frankly if he were questioned.

"Whatever happens," said George, "I will not tell a lie."

Madame Bréhal, overcome with emotion, was weeping. George fell on his knees beside the bed, and added in a trembling voice: "I little care as to what the authorities may do with me if you will only pardon and love me."

She had not the strength to answer, but he read in her eyes that he was already forgiven.

\* \* \* \* \*

A month in Paris is a century, and the crime of the Rue Gan-  
neron is now scarcely spoken of. The murderers have been arrested  
and have made a full confession; there were three of them—all ex-  
convicts, one of whom knew M. de Pontamur's habits, having been  
employed in sundry nasty affairs by this personage, whose ante-  
cedents were of the worst kind, although he had access to the best  
society. For instance, amongst various other things, it was dis-  
covered during the investigation of the affair that Maurice Saulieu's  
murderer had made a fortune in the Brazilian slave-trade.

Marianne Mezenc was only known in a limited circle, so that her  
tragical death attracted less attention than might have been expected.  
On hearing, at one and the same time, of her marriage and her

murder, people sincerely pitied Courtenay, as honourable men, unworthily deceived, are pitied. He was merely questioned by the magistrates for form's sake, and was not compelled to say anything untrue. He was not forced to state that he had merely married the odious creature in view of killing her, and no one suspected the part she had taken in Maurice Saulieu's death and Madame Bréhal's accident. The three ex-convicts will be tried at the next assizes, but George will not be called as a witness, and he is only awaiting Madame Bréhal's recovery to leave Paris. They will be married abroad, and spend the winter in Italy. When they return, envious folks and gossips will have had time to forget them ; moreover, all their enemies have already disappeared.

Corléon, after his misadventure at the club, thought it prudent to leave France, and he acted rightly, for, while raking up Pontaurmur's past, the police obtained some very bad information concerning his acolyte, who was found to be a rascal capable of any trickery. Madame Fresnay, that aunt who was not much better than her niece, and who contributed to her ruin, has eloped with a lover several years her junior, and she will probably not return to Paris, for, according to all appearances, her admirer will soon have squandered what remaining fortune she possesses. Poor Madame Mezenc mourns her daughter sincerely ; but she will lose nothing by Marianne's death, for she inherited her property ; and, at the time of her demise, Madame Courtenay, No. 1, had not renounced Maurice Saulieu's bequest. The mother will have a law suit with the provincial cousins, but she will win it. As for Delphine, she is now cutting a figure in the theatrical world ; and she has long since forgotten her admirer Fernando. She has also sold that famous chiffonier which recalled only unpleasant memories.

And the doctor ? Well, the doctor thoroughly enjoys the repose he has earned by two long months of tribulation. He has relapsed into his former habits, and he swears that he will never again undertake to serve any one as a second in a duel, still less to examine clues and clear up mysteries. He has also entirely given up the practice of medicine. It sufficed in his estimation that he had cured Madame Bréhal, and remained her friend. However, he has not changed his philosophy, and he persists in maintaining, like Voltaire's Dr. Pangloss, that all is for the best in the best of worlds. And he now adds to this saying a Shakespearian quotation : " All's well that ends well."

THE END.









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